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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Apartheid, History, and the Creative Writer: A View of Peter Abrahams

by

Francis Batabe Aleba

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled Apartheid, History, and the Creative Writer: A View of Peter Abrahams submitted by Francis Batabe Aleba in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Supervisor

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C. F. Bullock

....

Date APRIL 26, 1988

Dedication

To the memory of my grandmother, Kania (Old Lady) Atawunieh Adda.

Abstract

Shortly after the Second World War had started, Abrahams sailed--indeed, fled--from South Africa for England. But his flight was merely physical. As a creative artist, Abrahams, himself a South African Coloured, has thrived on the racial conflict in his native land. About this racial tragedy, he has, like one of his fictional characters, "built canvas after canvas" and turned words into pictures. Abrahams's refusal to be imprisoned in a political creed is absolute. Consequently, his comments on the South African problem in particular and on the question of individual freedom generally, as these comments are expressed in the artistic realm, are honest, intelligent, and humanistic.

Chapter I of the present thesis introduces Peter Abrahams and briefly considers the critical reception of his ideas and art in the 1940s and 1950s. The chapter also introduces Abrahams's basic, all-encompassing subject-matter, namely, the complex problem of individual freedom.

Chapter II examines Abrahams's exploration of the general subject of deprivation and the specific theme of miscegenation in South Africa. The discussion in this chapter is mainly of Dark Testament (1942), Song of the City (1945), Mine Boy (1946), and The Path of Thunder (1948); it seeks to illuminate Abrahams's dramatisation of the fundamental irreconcilability between individual freedom and dignity on one hand and the system of apartheid on the other.

Chapters III and IV analyse Abrahams's search, through his art, for an historical perspective on the problem of individual freedom. Under examination are five of Abrahams's novels--The View from Coyaba (1985), Wild Conquest (1950), A Wreath for Udomo (1956), A Night of Their Own (1965), and This Island Now (1966).

Chapter V discusses Abrahams's autobiography, Tell Freedom (1954), as the cry of a sensitive artist for personal freedom and dignity. The chapter shows how, in Abrahams's autobiography, far more than in his novels, the power of his art enhances his message of personal freedom.

Chapter VI concludes the thesis. It is a reflection, born of the preceding analyses, on the nature and quality of Abrahams's achievement.

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I. Introduction

By the time that twentieth-century phenomenon known as African literature gained momentum--roughly, in the late 1950s--Peter Abrahams had published a book of short stories, five novels, a work of factual reportage and an autobiography. While Abrahams's name has often been mentioned in the many critical discourses on African literature, his works have rarely been given the attention worthy of a pioneer African writer with considerable literary ability and indisputable political insight. At present, there are only two book-length critical studies of Peter Abrahams: the first one, by Michael Wade, was published in 1972[1] and the other, by Kolawole Ogungbesan, in 1979.[2] The commentators who have, in chapters of their books, given Abrahams serious, recurrent or sustained consideration are also sadly few. Among these, one must number Ezekiel Mphahlele, Wilfred Cartey, Charles Larson, O. R. Dathorne, Donald Burness, and Lewis Nkosi.[3] The only full-length general essays on Abrahams are Christopher Heywood's "The Novels of Peter Abrahams," published in 1971,[4] and Kolawole Ogungbesan's "A Long Way From Vrededorp: The Reception of Peter Abrahams's Ideas," first printed in 1980.[5] This paucity of critical material on Abrahams would seem to suggest that Abrahams's literary prowess is unremarkable and that his place in modern African literature is, at best, an uncertain or peripheral one. But it was no less an African literary giant than Ngugi wa Thiong'o who paired Abrahams and Achebe on the same pedestal and praised them for striving to "restore the African character to his history."[6] Earlier in 1964, the Malawian David Rubadiri placed Abrahams "high on the list" of black South African writers.[7] Even earlier, in 1961, in her essay, "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa," Nadine Gordimer regretted that, "with the exception of the novels of Peter Abrahams, there are no English novels written by black Africans for us to discuss...."[8] And in July 1956, in a paper presented at a conference held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Alan Paton, perhaps first among African writers to acknowledge Abrahams's stature, observed that "English fiction in South Africa is largely the work of British and Jewish writers, but it has one distinguished Coloured contributor, namely, Mr. Peter Abrahams," who, continued Paton, is "a forerunner, worthy to be placed with Olive Schreiner."[9] More recently, in an unfavourable analysis of Wild Conquest and A Wreath for Udomo, Lewis Nkosi considers Abrahams "a far more competent craftsman than many African" novelists whom I nevertheless find more satisfying than him."[10] There is also the fact that, few though they are, the critics who have taken Abrahams seriously are all respected names. If Abrahams is, at least, passable enough as a writer to have drawn the attention of a few observers of note, what are the possible reasons for his relative lack of recognition?

When Abrahams began writing in the early forties, there was not yet, strictly speaking, any literary criticism of African literature. The only points of view from which the outside world looked at works from or about Africa were those of the sociologist, the anthropologist, or the missionary. At the close of the next decade, in 1958, Chinua Achebe would publish Things Fall Apart following the success of which western critics would become interested in African writings for their literary qualities. But, even with Things Fall Apart, the period of the critics who were interested in linguistic subtlety and matters of plot construction was preceded by that of those who concerned themselves primarily with Achebe's presentation of traditional Ibo society and with all the controversies which that depiction generated. Abrahams wrote his short stories and first novels without deference to the contemporary sociological and anthropological interest in the "dark continent." The themes of the stories which make up Dark Testament (1942) are loss, deprivation, non-white racism, Boer antisemitism, miscegenation, and loneliness. They constitute, in effect, an announcement of preoccupations to come. The settings of these stories are casually-realised slums and locations in South Africa. Although Abrahams's South African world becomes more visible in Song of the City (1945), and Mine Boy (1946), its traditional African component is incognisable. As Charles Larson explains, this could not have been otherwise.[11] If many West and East African writers grew up at the crossroads of cultures, the young Coloured Abrahams had practically no experience of tribal society. It is true that one half of Wild Conquest (1950) is an impressive presentation of traditional African society. But, in Abrahams's writings, Wild Conquest remains the only novel of its kind. And, in any case, the world of the Matabele presented in it is borrowed material which Abrahams remolded and into which he breathed new life. In revolting against the Haggardian tradition,[12] Achebe and Ngugi began their careers as self-appointed spokesmen for the civilisation of the African past. Unburdened by any misunderstood or vilified traditional culture, Abrahams began his with a simple cry against the inhumanity of apartheid, with a simple plea for interracial tolerance, and with what was to become an unrelenting demand that his own oppressed side remain free of bigotry. Thus, time, place of birth, and personal inclination conspired to give Abrahams a small and token reception in the early forties.

That his reception might have been warmer had he taken care to incorporate the required amount of sociological content into his work, some of the reviews of his early books abundantly show. By the standards of the day, C.P. Snow's brief comment on Wild Conquest was so uniquely balanced and literary that one easily forgives Snow's unfulfilled prophecy, in South African fiction if not in West African fiction, that Wild Conquest "may be a forerunner of an entire school of African literary art."[13] Song of the City, written first but published second, was virtually unmentioned in the western press. The Times Literary Supplement review of Dark Testament tried to make up for what it saw as Abrahams's deficiencies by injecting in a little sociological flavour of its own. The review, entitled "The Native View," opened with the following couple of sentences: "Mr. Peter Abrahams is a South African native. This fact dominates whatever he writes."[14] The review of Mine Boy, four years later, was similar. After suggesting that the novel was an attempt to show how an African appeared "to a man of his own race," the reviewer proceeded to state the problem more explicitly: "How much of the setting may be fresh to English readers it is difficult for anyone acquainted with it to guess, and difficult too, to say how much of it may interest them."[15] In the New Republic, Daniel Friedenberg reviewed Mine Boy well and at some length, with due regard for the author's style. But even he drew attention to the problem when he ended by pointing out: "This is art--but it is not Africa."[16]

Indirectly and directly, Abrahams has also been a victim of the more recent nationalistic criticism of African scholars. Much of the criticism of African literature by Africans has become an expression of a parochial Africanism. There seems to be little tolerance in the field for those writers and critics who do not "toe the line." For example, a good deal of Adeola James's review article on Eustace Palmer's An Introduction to the African Novel is ideological, not literary argument. Admittedly, Palmer's book is a limited study, and his selection of the novelists who are worthy of being discussed is a very arbitrary one (indeed, he leaves out all South African novelists).

But his essays on eight African novelists are some of the best-written in African literature. Brilliant and thought-provoking, they certainly deserve a review from a more honest pen than Mrs. James's. She is "appalled" at Palmer's "level of [nationalistic] consciousness."[17] She sees Palmer's use of the term "native" to refer to the people of Kenya as "unpolitical" and insulting.[18] Palmer has no business, she presses on, striking parallels between African novels and European literature, for "must the African always copy from his white masters?"[19] And, in what is evidently wishful thinking, she declares that "few people will accept the idea of a 'rat-race' in Okonkwo's society...."[20] Palmer's reply to this review is more than justified self-defence; it is also a good lesson in what literary criticism ought to be.[21] The surprising thing is that, in refuting James's claim that the Umuofia presented in Things Fall Apart is not competitive or materialistic, Palmer does not refer to what Okonkwo's creator said in 1964: "Anyone who has given any thought to our society must be concerned by the brazen materialism one sees all around. I have heard people blame it on Europe. That is utter rubbish. In fact the Nigerian society I know best--the Ibo society--has always been materialistic."[22]

Unfortunately, Achebe has himself contributed to the acceptance of nationalistic criteria as a part of African literary criticism. One sees evidence of this in the first part of his book of essays, Morning Yet on Creation Day, where Achebe writes with uncharacteristic bitterness. He criticises Charles Larson for preaching universality as a creditable artistic objective because, for some strange reason, he believes that people like Larson would never "doubt the universality of their own literature."[23] Achebe must have known that his point about "colonialist criticism" here is a poor one because he had already recognised in an earlier essay that Eldred Jones, a Sierra Leonian critic whom he respects, is another advocate of universality.[24] Depending on one's point of view, one may reject or agree with S.O. Anozie's implicit criticism of those writers who see themselves as teachers. But it would be iniquitous to react to this, as Achebe does, by dismissing Anozie as one who follows "in the footsteps of certain Western literary schoolmasters."[25] It is equally unfair to overemphasise the idea that "the hallmark of a true artist [in Europe] is the ability to ignore society."[26] England's Victorian Age alone had more than its fair share of writers in pedagogical garbs! At stages in his raillery, Achebe emerges undiguised as a defender of nationalistic criticism: "There are clear signs that critics and readers from those areas of the world, where...memories of racism...exist, will more and more demand to know from their writers just on whose ideological side they are playing. And we writers had better be prepared to reckon with this questioning."[27] He even endorses the worst nationalistic posture possible: "But for the moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what...Sartre has called an antiracist racism...."[28] It was the sad fact of this counter-racism that Peter Abrahams lamented in his 1952 BBC broadcast: "In my fight against the system of South Africa...I may so change myself that I, too, become diseased by the virus I fight against. That, I hold, is the horror that is active among many Negroes today."[29] Abrahams does not rationalise or justify counter-racism. He is aware of his potential for it in order that he may better guard himself against it.

In a sense, Abrahams was destined to be either ignored or set up for target practice by those scholars whose criticism has an admixture of nationalistic elements, for it is his special fate that he has such a critical eye, in his fiction and essays, for what he perceives to be the destructive elements of traditional African culture. In his study of Abrahams, Michael Wade repeatedly draws attention to Abrahams's liberalism and passion for individual freedom, characteristics which have made Abrahams an unremitting critic of the exclusivist and undemocratic aspects of tribal society. It would not do to deny Abrahams the right to his views on traditional society because he was not born in it and had virtually no experience of it in his youth. The fact that he had so little experience of traditional life in his youth as to make the absence of an anthropological background in his early work understandable need not be irreconcilable with the fact that he had enough of a close-up view of tribal society in the fifties to be able to analyse it with justification. He went on a journalist's trip to Kenya in 1952 and, a year later, to the Gold Coast that was soon to become Ghana. In the two countries, he observed the crippling effects of tribal society and tribalism on Kenyatta and Nkrumah. In 1956, a year before Ghana's independence, Abrahams published his sixth work of fiction, _A Wreath for Udomo_. Set in what is recognisably the Gold Coast, this novel is, among other things, a bitter denunciation of tribalism in Africa. In it, tribalism is presented as one of the most formidable obstacles in the way of political and economic development in the new nations of Africa. Udomo is a "detribalized" western-educated political pragmatist whose efforts at national reconstruction are frustrated by a powerful tribal coalition. Towards the end of the novel, Udomo tells two of his former friends: "...our country has three enemies. First there is the white man. Then there is poverty. And then there is the past."[30] His death, which follows soon after, takes the form of a ritual execution replete with macabre drumming and dancing.

The oft-quoted review of *Udomo* is the captious one by Ulli Beier (who, in spite of his admirable work in African literature, shows symptoms of what Orwell called "transferred nationalism"). It is hard to imagine where Beier finds his evidence that "Peter Abrahams...believes in dictatorship for West Africa" or that "Peter Abrahams has succumbed to the white man's myth of the 'primitive' negro." How can Beier, with his knowledge of West Africa and his presence in the region during the independence decade, really believe that "Politically the old ways of life are not a force?"[31] The editor of *Black Orpheus* may be said to be guilty of anything but ignorance. In this review, he is certainly guilty of the intellectual dishonesty which is the price he had to pay when he allowed his anthropological devotion to West Africa to sway his literary judgement. Abrahams was once a friend of Nkrumah of whom Udomo is a fictional portrait. *Udomo* itself is proof of Abrahams's intimate knowledge of Ghana's independence struggle. In an angry editorial, a Ghanaian national newspaper nevertheless conceded that the novel's "link with events in Ghana is clear."[32] Abrahams knew that tribalism was a force with which Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party had to reckon. As he tells us in an essay, "A week...before my arrival he [Nkrumah] had threatened that, unless they [the tribal chiefs] cooperated... he would make them run so hard that they would leave their sandals behind. This was a calculated insult to the tribal concept that a chief's bare feet must never touch the earth."[33] The destructive impact of tribalism on political and economic development in West Africa is now well documented in history and political science books many of which have also recorded the Nigerian civil war as a grim reminder of this fact. Yet, recently, twenty-three years after Beier's review of *Udomo* in 1958, Lewis Nkosi defends Beier's criticism of Abrahams and, in the nationalistic tradition, goes on to condemn Abrahams for not following Achebe and Ngugi in recording and acknowledging the debt owed by contemporary African society to the African past. Predictably, Nkosi's nationalistic sentiments lead him into an embarrassing error of interpretation. Abrahams's sympathetic treatment of Udomo is, according to Nkosi, an "endorsement of Udomo's betrayal of Mhendi."[34] One may as well say that Shakespeare's sympathetic portrayal of Othello suggests the dramatist's approval of the Moor's murder of Desdemona or that, in Things Fall Apart, Achebe approves of Okonkwo's killing of the messenger. Even Ogungbesan, whose interest in Abrahams is equalled only by Wade's, often flaws his otherwise good studies with unsubstantiated declarations like the following: "For him [Abrahams] whatever evils it [colonialism] might have brought to the black man were more than offset by the single blessing of having freed him [the black man] from the evils of tribalism."[35] There are two main objectionable things about the nationalistic criticism of Peter Abrahams. First, it takes Abrahams's comments on tribal society out of context and pretends that Abrahams has no kind word for Africa's past. (But if it were indisputably true that Abrahams sees no good at all in traditional African culture, Ngugi's remark, referred to earlier in this introduction, would never have been made.)[36] Second, it implicitly suggests (and this is arrogant) that an African writer must depict traditional African culture extensively in order to be recognised as "committed" or "relevant." About these two points, however, more shall be said later in the main body of this thesis. One should now say a few introductory words about some stages in Abrahams's career as a political novelist.

Artistically as well as politically, Abrahams developed early. Before he turned eleven, he had met a studious Jewish girl at a smithy at which he was working in the Johannesburg Coloured slum of Vrededorp. She read to him Lamb's Tales from Shakespear which stimulated in his young heart a desire to write stories like Shakespeare, and started him thinking about going to school.[37] No sooner had he entered a primary school for Coloured children than he made a conscious effort to read Keats's poetry and Lamb's Tales. With literature, Abrahams took his first step out of the petty criminal life of Vrededorp: "I lived in two worlds," he tells us in his autobiography, Tell Freedom, "the world of Vrededorp and the world of these books" (Tell Freedom, p. 189). Such was the influence of Shakespeare and Keats on the young Abrahams that, by the time he was in his mid-teens, he knew he wanted "To write stories" (Tell Freedom, p. 220). But even as his creative faculties were stirred, so was his political consciousness aroused. The more Abrahams learned and read, the more acutely he felt the pain of deprivation. And, for Abrahams, when he wanted to urinate in a public lavatory, or rest on a park bench, or have a cup of tea in a cafe, deprivation was symbolised in the capitalised public warning, "RESERVED FOR EUROPEANS ONLY" (Tell Freedom, pp. 192-193). At this early stage in his development, the most significant event was his discovery, while employed as an office boy at the Bantu Men's Social Centre, of American negro literature. To such negro writers as W.E.B. Dubois, Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Georgia Douglas Johnson, Abrahams has recorded "a great debt for crystalizing my vague yearnings to write and for showing me the long dream was attainable" (Tell Freedom, p. 230).

The period that Abrahams spent at the Diocesan Training College in Pietersburg is worth noting for the light it throws on his attitude to interracial relations. Like Orwell at Eton, Abrahams attended college as a non-paying scholar. He had to follow a "routine of study and work," and in both of these preoccupations he found his white priest-teachers most agreeable: "Fathers Woodfield, Jones and Adams were the first white men whose colour I forgot" (Tell Freedom, p. 260). Even the Afrikaner Mr. Jansen "soon broke down the reserve all non-whites have toward Boers" (Tell Freedom, p. 261). However, the friendship Abrahams enjoyed from the whites within the walls of the Diocesan Training College only sharpened his sense of the racially tense world outside.

Shortly after leaving college, Abrahams next attended St. Peter's Secondary School outside Johannesburg. Ezekiel Mphahlele, who was also a student of this school at this time, remembers Abrahams in Down Second Avenue:

> ...dreamily he said what a wonderful thing it would be if all the Negroes... came back to Africa. Abrahams wrote verse in his exercise books and gave them to us to read. I admired them because here was a boy writing something like the collection of English poetry we were learning as a set book in school. I remember now how morose the verse was: straining to justify and glorify the dark complexion with the I'm black and proud of it theme.[11]

At St. Peter's, Abrahams soon ran into Marxist company. He became friends with a young couple, Cath and Harold, who called their explanation of events in this world "Dialectical Materialism" and "the creed by which they lived Marxism" (Tell Freedom, p. 297). But Abrahams's disillusionment with Marxism came very soon after he embraced it: "Had Marxism any room for the compassionate humanity that pervaded the life and teaching of Christ?" (Tell Freedom, p. 298) And his disillusionment became complete during his visit to Cape Town where he was shocked "at the ruthlessness with which the comrades seemed determined to herald the New Future" (Tell Freedom, p. 325). In Cape Town, Abrahams's refusal to give unreserved endorsement to the Trotskyist creed triggered a series of events which culminated in his leaving the home of Goolam Gool, his kind and considerate Marxist host.

Abrahams flirted with and rejected communism before he started writing. Given this fact, it is surprising that Michael Wade should see anything resembling a Marxist phase in Abrahams's novelistic career.[39] Abrahams's political and literary consciousness developed at a time which made his brief affair with communism almost inevitable. The 1919-39 period, which covers the time between Abrahams's birth and his departure from South Africa, corresponds almost exactly to the period (1917-1939) when, in the words of Richard Crossman, "[Communist] conversion was so common."[40] It was during this inter-war period that such politico-literary personalities as Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone and Richard Wright saw communism "as a vision of God on earth"[41] and then, after becoming active members of the Communist Party, rejected the communist "God" as "One" who "failed." However, unlike these men, Abrahams always remained an investigator of, never a convert to communism. He did not even, like Andre Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender, ever "worship" communism "from afar."[42] George Orwell is the western political writer whose relationship with Marxism invites a legitimate comparison with Abrahams's. Even when Orwell was energetically espousing certain Marxist ideas, it is doubtful that orthodox Marxists ever wanted him on their terraces. So it was with the Peter Abrahams who officially broke with the communists at the Daily Worker in England in 1942. Like Orwell, when Abrahams was most characteristically ideological, he nearly always was so with a difference. Both writers went beyond ideology to emphasise individual freedom and dignity. Abrahams's fiction, especially Song of the City, shows that he is familiar with the thinking and attitudes of Marxists. But this does not mean that his fictional perspective is ever Marxist. Two points render ironic Wade's opinion that Dark Testament is one ot the books which are illustrative of Abrahams's allegedly Marxist phase. First, Abrahams refused to present this book for the scrutiny of the English Communist Party before publication. Second, the Daily Worker greeted Dark Testament with a scathing review (Goli, pp. 16-17).

Abrahams is a writer for whom every significant personal experience is rudimentary material for fiction. There is evidence in his writings that his experiences in South Africa and, to some extent, in England, Kenya, Ghana, and Jamaica have left deeply engraved impressions in his mind. These impresssions must have been especially vivid in his most productive years, between 1942 and 1957, when he published a total of nine books. It is easy to underestimate his abilities as a novelist and as an autobiographer. It is true that his style is not always free of undesirably ponderous expressions. But, generally, he writes with a straightforwardness which some mistake for oversimplicity. Indeed, the fact that Abrahams's creativity thrives on his real-life experiences has misled a perceptive critic like Michael Wade into reading staightforward autobiography in "I Remember," the "reminiscence" with which Dark Testament opens. Having mistaken the rare story-teller's "I" for the more common autobiographical "I," Wade calls Abrahams's honesty (or carefulness) into question: "Abrahams claims that the stories and sketches were written between 1930 and 1938, which would mean that the earliest were produced when he was eleven years old and had, by his own account, only just begun attending school."[43] One may add that, at eleven, Abrahams did not speak, read or write English. Why did Abrahams not write a preface to introduce himself and the stories in Dark Testament but instead chose to write "I Remember" as the first of fourteen sketches which cannot be called factual without reservation? Why is the memorable classroom incident in "I Remember" nowhere recalled in Tell Freedom? It is reasonable to conclude that Abrahams has, in the "reminiscence," deliberately blurred the conventional demarcation between fact and fiction. Abrahams's autobiography itself may be said to be self-consciously literary. The author hints at this in the title, "Tell Freedom." In the word "Tell," he alerts us to the fact that his narrative has elements of a tale, that he is as concerned with how he tells his life-story as with the account itself. Indeed, the novelistic element in Abrahams's autobiography is undeniable. The dialogues are competently handled, and the relationship between form and content is very visible. Tell Freedom helps to make the case that the writing of autobiography can be a full-time literary activity.

The essay which follows is not a defence of Peter Abrahams as a writer. It is a critical study, a roughly chronological analysis of all of Abrahams's major writings, a full exploration of his world. Its central thesis is Abrahams's preoccupation with the question of individual freedom and dignity, and this thesis is first examined through an analysis of such recurrent concerns in Abrahams's early works as the themes of deprivation and miscegenation in South Africa. Some of Abrahams's later novels are as preoccupied with poverty and racial matters as are his early novels and short stories, but it is the early writings which are especially concerned with deprivation, poverty, interracial sex, and interracial love. Also discussed is what Abrahams calls his "long view," the sense of history which informs his dramatisation, especially in his later novels, of the problem of individual freedom in this world. Finally, Tell Freedom, Abrahams's autobiographical statement on the question of personal freedom, is analysed. In the discussion of Tell Freedom, some aspects of Abrahams's autobiographical technique are compared with aspects of his fictional technique. His use of atmosphere is especially scrutinised in order to illuminate the different analogies he strikes between the pictorial landscapes and the human crises of his created world. Many critics of autobiography undertake to explore the issue of genre and truth. The present writer, however, sees this noble pursuit as belonging to the realm of critical biography and not to literary criticism as such. Tell Freedom is therefore considered, in the essay which follows, as imaginative self-analysis, in other words as literary autobiography. The essay concludes with an assessment of Abrahams's place in the modern literature of Africa.

Perhaps, one should end this introduction with a few words about the reason for the application of the word "apartheid," in the present study, not only to post-1948 South Africa, but to pre-Nationalist Government South Africa. It is indisputable that the Afrikaans word "apartheid" was virtually unheard of before 1943, the year in which it was first used in the Cape National Party newspaper, Die Burger. As the world knows only too well, "apartheid" became the slogan of the National Party in the 1948 elections, and the official policy of the South African government thereafter. This post-1948 official apartheid, sometimes referred to as "grand apartheid," was an institutionalised, constitutionalised racial ideology, a system undoubtedly more totalitarian than the one which had existed before 1948. It was a revolutionary doctrine which advocated racial separation in every conceivable sphere of South African life, and one of its grandest innovations was the idea of segregating the black population into "homelands" or "bantustans."

However, if official or "grand" apartheid was an intensification of anything, it was an intensification of the system of racial segregation which had existed in South Africa long before 1948. The Group Areas Act of 1950, which provided for the establishment in cities, towns and villages, of separate areas for the different racial groups, was a more comprehensive form of the 1923 Native Urban Areas Act under which most Africans had long been segregated in urban areas. The Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 (which forbade marriage between whites and all non-whites) and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 (which prohibited sexual relations between whites and all non-whites) were extensions of the Immorality Act of 1927 (which prescribed severe penalties for sex between whites and blacks). One should also point out that the Natives Land Act, arguably the most important of South Africa's post-Union pieces of legislation, was introduced not after 1948, but as far back as 1913.

Clearly, then, even if the word "apartheid" was not heard of until 1943, and even if the system of apartheid was not officially enforced until the period after the National Party victory in May 1948, there was in South Africa a system very much like apartheid before--yes, long before--1948. There are writers who refer to the system of segregation and racism before 1948 as "petty apartheid" in an attempt to distinguish this system (semantically, at least) from the "grand apartheid" of post-1948 South Africa. Needless to say, from the point-of-view of the victims of so-called "petty apartheid," there could not have been anything "petty" about inhuman laws like the Natives Land Act of 1913, the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923, and the Immorality Act of 1927. Pointing out the difference of degree between "petty apartheid" and "grand apartheid" is justifiable. Otherwise, in a study of Abrahams, a number of whose works are set in pre-1948 South Africa, a constant distinguishing of these terms is cumbersome and ultimately unimportant. The conditions of the non-European characters in those of Abrahams's works set in pre-1948 South Africa are little different from the conditions of the non-European characters in those of his works set in post-Nationalist Government South Africa. Herein lies the reason for the use of "apartheid," in the chapters which follow, as a descriptive word not only for the ideology according to which South Africa has been governed since 1948, but also for the system of racial segregation which had existed in South Africa before D.F. Malan and his associates climbed into the seats of power and wreaked even more havoc.

Notes

[1] Michael Wade, *Peter Abrahams* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1972).

[2] Kolawole Ogungbesan, *The Writing of Peter Abrahams* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979).

[3] Ezekiel Mphalele, *The African Image* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), pp. 177-182.

Wilfred Cartey, *Whispers from a Continent: The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa* (New York: Random House Inc., 1969), pp. 37-42, 149-152, 182-193.

Charles R. Larson, *The Emergence of African Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 160-166.

O.R. Dathorne, *African Literature in the Twentieth Century* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1975), pp. 137-144.

Donald Burness, *Shaka King of the Zulus in African Literature* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1976), pp. 109-112.

Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (Harlow, Essex, U. K.: Longman Group Ltd., 1981), pp. 47-51.

[4] Christopher Heywood, "The Novels of Peter Abrahams," in *Perspectives on African Literature*, Selections from the Proceedings of the Conference of African Literature held at the University of Ife, 1968, ed. C. Heywood (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), pp. 157-172.

[5] Kolawole Ogungbesan, "A Long Way from Vrededorp: The Reception of Peter Abrahams's Ideas," *Research in African Literature*, 11, No. 2, (Summer 1980), 187-205.

[6] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "The Writer and His Past," in his *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* (1972; rpt. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1981), p. 43.

[7] David Rubadiri, "Why African Literature?" in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed. G.D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 142-143.

[8] Nadine Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa," in *African Writers on African Writing*, p. 45.

[9] Alan Paton, "The South African Novel in English" [Paper presented at a Conference of Writers, Editors and University Teachers of English, held at the University

of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in July 1956. Witwatersrand University Press, 1957], publ. in Alan Paton, Knocking on the Door: Shorter Writings, ed. Colin Gardner (Cape Town: David Philip; London: Rex Collins, 1975), p. 141.

[10] Nkosi, Tasks and Masks, p. 49.

[11] Larson, The Emergence of African Fiction, pp. 160-162.

[12] Ngugi coins the proper adjective "Haggardian" in his essay, "The Writer and His Past," found in his collection of essays, Homecoming. The adjective is, of course, derived from the name of the English novelist, Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925). The view of Ngugi and Achebe is that, in such famous novels as She, King Solomon's Mines, and Allan Quatermain, Rider Haggard was guilty of Victorian paternalism towards African natives.

[13] C.P. Snow, "Atmospherics," rev. of Moira, by Julian Green, Wild Conquest, by Peter Abrahams, Mist Over Pendle, by Robert Neill, and The Street, by Dorothy Baker, Sunday Times, 20 May 1951, p. 3.

[14] "The Native View," rev. of Dark Testament, by Peter Abrahams, Times Literary Supplement, 16 Jan. 1943, p. 34.

[15] Review of Mine Boy, by Peter Abrahams, Times Literary Supplement, 5 Oct. 1946, p. 477.

[16] Daniel M. Friedenberg, "From the Slums of Johannesburg," rev. of Mine Boy, by Peter Abrahams, New Republic, 27 June 1955, p. 20.

[17] Adeola James, rev. of An Introduction to the African Novel, by Eustace Palmer, African Literature Today, No. 7 (1975), p. 148.

[18] James, p. 151.

[19] James, p. 151.

[20] James, p. 149.

[21] Eustace Palmer, "A Plea for Objectivity: A Reply to Adeola James," African Literature Today, No. 7, pp. 123-127.

[22] Chinua Achebe, "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," in African Writers on African Writing, p. 11.

[23] Chinua Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism," in Morning Yet on Creation Day (New York: Anchor Press Doubleday, 1975), p. 13.

[24] Chinua Achebe, "Thoughts on the African Novel," in Morning Yet on Creation Day, pp. 85-88.

[25] Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism," p. 21.

[26] Chinua Achebe, "Africa and Her Writers," in Morning Yet on Creation Day, p. 35.

[27] Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism," p .19.

[28] Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher," in Morning Yet on Creation Day, pp. 71-72.

[29] Peter Abrahams, Return to Goli (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 20. All further references to this work appear in the body of the text.

[30] Peter Abrahams, A Wreath for Udomo (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 348.

[31] Akanji [Ulli Beier], rev. of A Wreath for Udomo, by Peter Abrahams, Black Orpheus, No. 4 (Oct. 1958), p. 57.

[32] The Daily Graphic, quoted in Ogungbesan, "A Long Way from Vrededorp: The Reception of Peter Abrahams's Ideas," p. 191.

[33] Peter Abrahams, "The Blacks," in An African Treasury, ed. Langston Hughes (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1960), p. 48.

[34] Nkosi, Tasks and Masks, p. 50.

[35] Ogungbesan, " A Long Way from Vrededorp: The Reception of Peter Abrahams's Ideas,' p. 202.

[36] See p. 2 of this essay.

[37] Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), pp. 171-174. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[38] Ezekiel Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue (1959; rpt. New York: Anchor Books, Inc., 1971), p. 116.

[39] See, for example, Wade, pp. 5-6.

[40] Richard Crossman, ed., The God That Failed, by Andre Gide and others (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), p. 2.

[41] Crossman, p. 3.

[42] Crossman, "Contents" page.

[43] Wade, p. 8.

II. 'Those Things That a Human Being Must Have': The Themes of Deprivation and Miscegenation in Abrahams's Early Writings

Deprivation is, in the fiction of Peter Abrahams, an efficient means with which the apartheid government of South Africa robs the individual of his self-worth and freedom. In this fiction, the non-whites of South Africa are presented as deprived at two levels: on one level, they are not allowed to have and, at the other, they are not allowed to belong. In "I Remember," the very first sketch in Dark Testament, Abrahams introduces the theme of deprivation. The artist-speaker remembers a day at primary school on which he fainted: "When I came to I had to admit I'd only had a slice of bread in two days. They gave me food, but that only made me ill, so I was sent to the General Hospital....They said I was suffering from starvation. Then they let me out to starve again...." [1] It is no wonder that, as a boy, the speaker cannot separate his desire to write stories from his desire to eat and live well:

> I want to be a writer so that I can write stories about everything. You know, like the stories in books. That will make me famous, and I'll have cakes and ginger beer for breakfast, and fish and chips for lunch, and a whole fowl at night. Then, I'll be able to eat three times every day, and have shoes and a motor car, and eat like the rich white people do. And then I want to wear a collar and tie. That's why I want to write stories. (Dark Testament, pp. 9-10)

Similarly, the life of the Coloured narrator in "One of the Three" is characterised by never-ending deprivation and pain: "Poverty, want of a woman's companionship, and the other things which the non-European South African of education knows so well" (Dark Testament, p. 14). For his two friends, Tommy and Johnny, life is pretty much the same. Tommy, we are told, "was not very ambitious. He just wanted to overcome the dreaded thing: Poverty" (Dark Testament, p. 12). Abrahams implies that the human need to have, even when this need is expressed in the non-European section of the South African population, should not be regarded as a luxury. It is a basic human right. Johnny's mother "had starved to keep him at school, and he had not known" (Dark Testament, p.14). Utterly defeated by life, "one night, Johnny took lysol..." (Dark Testament, p. 15). For the sensitive and artistic non-European souls, the choice is between exile and suicide. Johnny kills himself because he has gone to a coastal town and failed "to get away in a boat" (Dark Testament, p. 14). Had Abrahams failed to leave South Africa in 1939, his fate would have probably been the same. As he says at the end of Tell Freedom, "I had to go or be for ever lost." [2]

The message of "The Old Watchman" is that a marriage which is founded on love is an unlikely occurrence among people who are deprived of their elementary needs. The old watchman remembers the days when, as a promising articled clerk, he had looked forward to marrying the beautiful Sal. In obedience to her parents, Sal decides to marry instead a rich suitor who "had bonds on their home and farm" and to whom her father owed "some thousands of pounds" (Dark Testament, p. 55). Before they can think of their daughter's happiness, Sal's parents must "save the family" (Dark Testament, p.55). However, Sal does not leave the man of her heart without a consolation prize. She lives with him for three days during which the young clerk does not believe that it is "humanly possible to be so happy" (Dark Testament, p. 55). It is Abrahams who makes it clear that, far from fulfilling a hope, the clerk simply rests content with an illusion of fulfilment. The destructive impact of deprivation on the private relationships of South African non-whites is also evident in Mine Boy. Shortly after his arrival in Johannesburg, Xuma falls in love with the young teacher, Eliza. For long, he suffers the pain of unreturned affection because Eliza's consciousness of her deprivation and her consequent longing for the things of the white man suppress her love for the black and uneducated Xuma. Leah, the shebeen queen, warns Xuma that Eliza will likely choose her husband from among "people who smoke cigars like the white man and have motor cars and wears [sic] suits every day."[3] Eliza is, as Leah correctly diagnoses, sick with "the madness of the city" (Mine Boy, p. 172). But Eliza is herself an eloquent spokesman for her condition. At first, she presents her problem to Xuma as a mysterious thing, as "Something hard that drives me" (Mine Boy, p. 87). Then, when she refuses Xuma'a sexual invitations, she makes a blunt confession to explain her conduct: "...it is because I want the things of the white people....Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person....I cannot help it" (Mine Boy, p. 89). In Mine Boy, the relationship of Xuma and Eliza is not the only one which is aborted by deprivation. In the period that antedates the action in the novel, another love affair, a less noticeable one, was not to culminate in marriage because of a man's longing to rise above his station as a black man in apartheid South Africa. The victimised lady in that relationship was Ma Plank who now consoles the grief-stricken Xuma the morning after he is deserted by Eliza: "Eliza is a good girl and I know she loves only you. She has the same sickness [the madness of the city] that

Daddy had, Xuma, and I loved Daddy, so I know..." (Mine Boy, p. 210).

Education gives the South African non-European a more acute sense of his deprivation. A case in point is the starving melancholiac in "The Virgin." David Mason's learning and creativity increase his bitterness, as expressed through his writing, about the fact that he is a failure who often goes for three days without food (Dark Testament, p.142). He is acutely aware of his loneliness and powerlessness in a society which determinedly keeps him deprived and, in his resultant despondency, he seeks communion with such dead artists as John Keats, Arthur Sterling, and Vincent van Gogh. For a brief moment during the period he is nursed by Rosie the prostitute, he understands that education need not fuel discontent and despair in a man's heart. With Rosie at his side, he will now use his education and creativity to write not about "people who work and get drunk and fight because they lack education," but about "people with souls that are crying for understanding..." (Dark Testament, p. 158). He will, in other words, cease being a recorder of the commonplace and try to capture the irrepressible spirituality and humanity of man. But he soon relapses into his old language of poverty-induced despair: "Yes. My name is David Mason. I am twenty-five. For all those years I have gone without those things that a human being must have. Proper food. Good clothing. A warm bed. A woman to talk to in the language of the spirit and the body....I have gone without all these" (Dark Testament, p. 142). In the end, David Mason finds solace in death. Fieta, in The Path of Thunder, advises Lanny Swartz not to establish a school in the Coloured community of Stilleveld because "Education will not be good for these people....If they get learning they will start longing for things they have never thought of before."[4] It is in Mabel, Lanny's sister, that the validity of Fieta's opinions are seen. Mabel has no formal education, but she is "educated" about her worth as a human being by the English anthropologist with whom she is infatuated. She tries to explain this fact to her brother: "That white man showed me that I'm as good as Sarie Villier [the novel's beautiful Afrikaner heroine]..." (The Path, p. 133). Earlier, as she sits in the anthropologist's car, Mabel imagines herself as she would like to be: "For Mabel the world was transformed. She wasn't colored and she wasn't poor and she wasn't Mabel and she didn't work. She was a grand white lady and this was her car and this was her husband beside her" (The Path, p. 106). With her new sense of self, the petty theft which is a consequence of her deprivation gives way to a strong urge to go to Cape Town and realise an honest ambition or two.

Clearly, Michael Wade misses the point when he complains about "the sheer unrelatedness of" Mabel's relationship with the English anthropologist "to the concerns of the plot."[5] One is tempted to ask naively, "What unrelatedness?" Although the episode is, as Wade says, detrimental to the characterisation of Mabel, its centrality to the theme of deprivation cannot be denied. To Abrahams, the most horrifying aspect of the poverty of Stilleveld is its debilitating effect. Abrahams's portrait of this Coloured community is a picture of a people whose deprivation has bred in them a self-destructive passivity and a tendency to view their condition as something ordained from above. Lanny Swartz compares the poor people of Stilleveld with those of Cape Town. "Inside," some of the poor of Cape Town "were free of their poverty." Not so those of Stilleveld who have resigned themselves to their fate and in whom poverty "was there, inside them, and...was even worse than the poverty in which they lived" (The Path, p. 35). (During a visit to Puerto Rico, much later, Abrahams again noted this dreadful psychological effect of poverty.)[6] When, with the help of the English anthropologist, Mabel frees herself from the hold of her community, she expresses the idea of dignity in deprivation which Abrahams evidently respects. The presence of Fieta in the episode of Mabel and the Englishman is another reason for the episode's relevance to the plot. The exchange between Fieta and the anthropologist represents the conflict between the conservative realism of the sufferer and the liberal optimism of the detached observer. Fieta loses the debate because Abrahams does not think that her identity as a non-white should excuse her bigotry. That her behaviour is attributable to the fact that she has suffered much in a white-dominated society cannot be denied. However, when she is suspicious and distrustful of the anthropologist on the basis of the man's colour alone, she exhibits the kind of attitude that is an impediment to the realisation of Abrahams's hope for a world without colour. In the English anthropologist, Abrahams strives to make the point that it is wrong for the deprived non-Europeans to perceive every white person as an enemy. Like Paddy O'Shea in Mine Boy and Paul Van As in Wild Conquest, the Englishman is no more than a caricature. But, like them, he is in African literature's line-up of benevolent white stock characters whose function is to demonstrate the absurdity of an "All non-whites are good, all whites are bad" attitude.

The poverty of the non-Europeans of South Africa is rooted in the government's division of the country's land along racial lines. Even before the implementation of official *apartheid*, the Coloureds and the Asians lived in overcrowded and dirty hovels in the slum areas. These shantytowns, situated outside the cities, are the settings of the stories in *Dark Testament*. The old, hard-working woman who loves and loses her daughter and her grand-daughter ("Love"), Mr. Death in the story of that title, the society of Coloureds who die one after another ("S'ciety"), and the night life which is characterised by sex, hunger and gambling ("Saturday Night")--these are all products of South Africa's Coloured locations. The real-life degenerate state of the locations realises in itself some of the strangeness of the fiction. In 1952, Abrahams was commissioned by the *Observer* of London to visit South Africa and report on the living conditions of the non-whites. In *Return to Goli*, the factual book which was the result of that visit, Abrahams describes one of the most unpleasant aspects of life in the slums:

> ...everywhere...I found bucket lavatories. Around these flies formed their kingdoms. From these kingdoms they sallied forth to the meal tables, or the bits of bread and jam children munched while they played, or on to the lips and eyes of some sleeping child. And the children had sores on their mouths and runny eyes and noses and diarrhoea and always suffered from stomach troubles. [7]

Abrahams was not the only journalist on a visit to South Africa in the early fifties. Professor Herbert Tingsten, the editor-in-chief of the Swedish newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, was also in the Union on a fact-finding mission. Of the land on which the locations are situated, he says: "...there is nothing green, no trees nor anything country-like in the vicinity. The roads are the only playgrounds of the children. When it rains, those roads turn into quagmires; in dry weather they get covered with layers of dust inches thick."[8] In the slums Tingsten saw hovels which were "practically heaped upon each other because only limited slices of land have been made available."[9] Abrahams's observation is similar: "People lived on top of each other. Children watched their parents wash and bath and dress; were half-frightened, half-fascinated spectators or listeners to the most intimate act of love" (*Goli*, p. 55).

The black South Africans have been hit the hardest by the *apartheid* government's racial allocation of land. When Abrahams was in South Africa in 1952, there were, "According to the latest census report," 8,535,341 blacks and 2,643,187 whites in the Union. Under the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, the government had set aside a small portion of the lands of the Union as "reserved lands" for the blacks. In the early fifties, three million of the total black population were forcibly settled on 47,255 square miles of "reserved lands," in other words on 10 per cent of the total land area of South Africa, the remaining 90 percent being the domain of the whites (Goli, p.106). The advocates of territorial apartheid argue that the reserves will one day provide the natives with a "national home" where they will be free to develop as a distinctive racial group. In Song of the City, Professor Ashe and Doctor Timbata, two such advocates, explain to the Minister of Native Affairs their "plan for complete, absolute, segregation, politically and otherwise":

> We suggest that the Government make a grant of a sum of money and set aside certain tracts of land either in the Transkei or up North in the Piertersburg area, and permit, let us say a hundred thousand Africans to settle there and build up a self-supporting group. This group will owe allegiance to the Government, but will run its own domestic affairs. It will set up its own police and courts, and its own Government. This would solve what is known as the Native question without any disruption of the country.[10]

Not only has territorial apartheid failed to solve the "Native question" in the real-life South Africa, it is also steadily and surely pushing the country towards a bloody racial confrontation. The "reserved lands" have become nothing more than reservoirs of cheap labour. A black "homeland" is not even a unified whole; in some cases, the patches of land which make up a homeland are scattered all over the country. In Song of the City, it is Hendrik Van der Merwe, that tragic agent of apartheid, who ironically speaks the unchallengeable words of wisdom: "The idea of a State within a State is not feasible" (Song, p. 40). In the first place, in the real-life South Africa, white officials constitute the final decision-making body in the administration of the reserves despite the presence of a number of elected black members in the local government. Therefore, apart from quarreling with the idea of an autonomous "national home" for the blacks, one must question the honesty of a government which expresses this idea. Secondly, no able-bodied black man with a family to look after remains in the reserves for long. Many of the young men leave for work in the cities and, with a taste of a different life, they inevitably find themselves like T. S. Eliot's Magi "no longer at ease in the old dispensation." To many of the blacks, then, the reserves are anything but "homes." Situated on the poorest land in the country, the reserves have a terribly low yield from crop and cattle farming. It is about this that Alan Paton speaks when he fills the opening pages of Cry the Beloved Country with such lyric sorrow: "Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man. They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and girls are away. The soil cannot keep them anymore."[11] Such glimpses of the barren land are, unfortunately, the closest that there is in creative literature to a picture of life on South Africa's reserves. From the point of view of literary creation, it is a pity that the novelists of South Africa should know about the misery of the reserves and not belong to them. These writers have seen, not lived the life of the reserves. Their imaginative faculties are therefore little equipped to conjure up the appropriate sombre colours and the typical domestic tragedies which are indispensable to a creative depiction of life in these unproductive lands.

So Peter Abrahams, like other South African writers, focuses on the urban reality of the black mine-workers. In Mine Boy, Abrahams evokes the work of the mine boys with such thorough-going realism that he underlines the literalness of the truth that South African society is built upon the sweat of its black population. In the picturesque scene in which he presents Xuma at work on the mines, he displays fascinating powers of description. We see Xuma and the other workers in their endless labour of moving sand, and we see them as they "gasped for breath and their eyes turned red and beads of sweat stood on their foreheads...." Indeed, the machine-like efficiency of the men is comparable to the rapidity with which "A truck would come from the bowels of the earth." Then would come the psychological humiliation of the men as they realise their muscular inability to reduce the size of the sand pile: "This mocking of a man by the sand that was always wet and warm..." (Mine Boy, pp. 65-66). The whole passage, as Michael Wade points out, "stands in its own right and is convincing and horrifying."[12] Towards the end of the novel, Abrahams dramatises the lack of concern on the part of the managerial staff for the mine workers. The Coloured worker Johannes and his white boss Chris die in an accident because an engineer has earlier refused to heed Xuma's warning that a roof is sagging. Shortly after the bodies of the two men have been carried out, the manager shows his disregard for human life when he tells the workers: "The mine's all right. Get ready to go down, night shift!" (Mine Boy, p. 247) In reaction to this, Xuma, now completely politicised, cries "No" and largely creates an overdue strike. Xuma's "No" is the historical response of the rebel to the tyrant. The key word of Antigone, "the first rebel of Western tradition," was "NO."[13] In her stand against Creon, Antigone asserted her right to abide by principles which she considered superior to those of the state. Therefore, as Andre Brink has observed, Antigone's "NO" was really a "Yes": "...it is a rebellion not simply directed against something, but aimed towards something. It is not negative, but positive.... No to all the forces which try to deny the human; yes to all the attributes of dignified human life."[14] In dramatising the dehumanising of South Africa's black workers, Abrahams is careful to point out that it is not white pigmentation which makes oppressors of men. Two white men defy race solidarity and side with the workers, one to die with Johannes and the other to go to jail with Xuma.

Boss boys like Xuma and Johannes are the only ones who are spared the misery of living in the mining compounds which house about three hundred thousand of their fellow mine-workers. As Johannes explains to Xuma, many of the mine boys "are not of the city.... The white man fetched them. And those that are fetched must live in the compounds. It is the law here" (Mine Boy, p.55). During Abrahams's time in South Africa, the real-life situation of the workers was even more excruciating. From their barrack-like existence, they could not stir without permission, and their wives and children were not allowed to visit them. They were often fed well, but only like valuable beasts of burden. Their protests, when the food was bad, were frequently greeted with contempt by the mine authorities. In Nadine Gordimer's The Lying Days, the narrator's father who is also Assistant Secretary of a mine scornfully laughs away a mine boys' food strike: "All this to-do over mealie-pap....A storm in a porridge pot, a storm in a porridge pot." [15] The impression that one has of the compounds is not unlike that which one has of well-organised prisons. In his short story, "Last Letter," Cosmo Pieterse tells of the removal of a man, Nkosi, from a mine-compound to prison. The reader senses that the mine-compound, from which Nkosi has been removed, is another kind of prison. Pieterse describes the compound as having "concrete bunks" which "were ice-trays in the chamber of night's refrigerator." The Mining House has "steel bones" which "contracted, grazing their blue-brown shins against the rasp of dead sand and mortar." Life in the compounds is seen as "a Siberian night in the House of the Dead," as a night in which the mine boys "were dead but...did not know it yet, and because they were dead they could not know it."[16] To Pieterse, then, the mining compounds are veritable prison-houses for South Africa's black miners. Whereas Abrahams has, in Mine Boy, concentrated on the hellish nature of the mine-work of the blacks, Pieterse has touched on an aspect of their beast-like existence.

It is not only because they are denied their daily bread that the non-whites of South Africa are a sad lot. True, the mere denial of a human being his right to have causes him degradation enough. However, the deeper tragedy of the darker races of South Africa is discernible in the fact that their country's laws sanction, condone, or remain silent about the brutal treatment meted out to them by the police and the abuses hurled at them in public. The very existence of a colour-bar and of laws which require the black citizens of the country to carry identity documents to explain their presence at any place at any given time of day underlines the condition of the South African non-white as a stranger in his own country. It is this point that Abrahams strives to emphasise when he populates the pages of Dark Testament with characters who are outcasts. In the story appropriately entitled "Lonesome," the narrator complains about his "awful loneliness" and expresses his longing for "Somebody to sit with quietly. Somebody to talk to. Somebody to look at" (Dark Testament, p. 59). When he finds a friendly white female communist, they are not free to converse wherever they choose. They decide on "a non-European cafe where we went so that it would be all right" (Dark Testament, p. 60). In the title story, "The Testament," one may disagree with the argument of the white lawyer that his non-white client should be acquitted of the charge of murder because the latter does not understand the foreign laws which have been imposed on him. There is even a modicum of unconscious racism in the lawyer's implicit suggestion that murder is natural to the non-European. However, the lawyer's plea is, in part, a valid statement on the alienation of the non-white in racist South Africa: "Nothing is more pathetic than to fit nowhere. Nothing is more pathetic than to be an outcast. And, gentlemen of the jury, when you return your verdict, remember this: You are dealing with a person whose life has made him what he is" (Dark Testament, p. 75). South Africa's pass laws are the clearest manifestation of the denial of the black man his right to belong. In the world of Song of the City, Nduli's first duty upon reaching the first white dorp after leaving his tribal village is to report himself to the police station and get a pass--and, although he does not expect it, a European first name. However, the right to force a name on an African native on his first visit to the city is merely a mild expression of the monstrous power of *apartheid*. On his way home from work one night, Dick Nduli gets a bitter taste of this power when a policeman confronts him. He lands Nduli a blow to the side of the head because "Why didn't you stop when I called you, heh?" During the interrogation which follows, the policeman calls Nduli a liar, a bastard, a thief, and a kaffir. In the end, he dismisses the lad with a threat: "And next time you don't stop when a policeman calls you I'm going to break your neck, do you hear?" (*Song*, pp. 20-21)

In a society like this, only the brute strength of a Xuma can save a native from immediate physical humiliation. In *Mine Boy*, the day after his arrival in the city, Xuma is taken sight-seeing by Joseph, "the brother of Leah's man" (*Mine Boy*, p. 27). When they stroll into an area where the police have just begun a surprise raid on gamblers, Xuma, alone among the people around him, refuses to run. When a policeman hits and kicks him, Xuma strikes back and then "bunched his great fist and struck again. Hard." "The policeman," we are told, "groaned and collapsed in a heap and lay still" (*Mine Boy*, p. 31). However, even the mighty Xuma's reaction is an angry and involuntary response, not a conscious and heroic stance against the system. As soon as he realises that this is no place for village chivalry, Xuma mutters "Now I will run" and actually runs as only a man with fear in his heart can run (*Mine Boy*, p. 31). Later on, when he has learnt and better understood the ways of the city, Xuma treads warily. In the white-dominated "heart of the city," he walks with utmost caution. It is only when he is in Malay Camp that he "rubbed against the people and did not step out of the way" and "bumped against them and felt their warmth and softness" (*Mine Boy*, p. 102). In Malay Camp, Xuma is able to say, even as the speaker in "Lonesome" might have said, "It was all right here" (*Mine Boy*, p. 102). There cannot be many stronger commentaries on the alienation of the South African non-white than this cautious and discriminating movement of a Herculean man.

If the non-Europeans of South Africa are denied the right to *belong*, so, albeit less obviously, are the whites. One may safely assert that no white person in South Africa who opposes *apartheid* in print, word, or deed enjoys a life free from arrests, detentions, or surveillance. If Big Brother watches and threatens the black masses who constitute the "proles," he also watches and threatens such "inner circle" dissidents as Alan Paton, Trevor Huddleston, Nadine Gordimer, Athol Fugard, Donald Woods, and Andre Brink. In his book of essays, Mapmakers, Brink illustrates, with the real-life tragedy of the Afrikaner Bram Fischer, that it can be a terrible wrath that the apartheid government vents on its opponents and resisters. Bram Fischer rejected apartheid and, to demonstrate this, he did not hesitate, after all non-violent means had proven futile, to collaborate in a programme of selective sabotage. For this, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. Ten years later, Fischer contracted cancer and was released on parole to die. But, in South Africa, as in Orwell's fictional Oceania, not even the memory of dead dissidents is tolerated. This is why, in the world of Nineteen Eighty-Four, opponents of the regime are "vaporised" and all records of their identities destroyed. And this is why the South African government claimed Fischer's ashes after his death; for, as Brink says, "even the ashes of a free man can be dangerous in a state ruled by fear and suspicion."[17]

In Abrahams's work, the subject of white alienation lacks the complexity that it has in, say, Doris Lessing's The Grass is Singing or in some of the works of Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer. This is most probably because Abrahams is not a white man, but also because empathy outside his own racial group does not seem to be one of his strong points (except, possibly, in Wild Conquest). However, Abrahams recognises that the whites of South Africa are, like the non-whites, deprived of the right to belong. In the short story, "Lonesome," the white lady with whom the Coloured speaker goes to a non-European cafe "so that it would be all right" is as much a victim of the colour-bar as her non-white friend. Perhaps, Abrahams's best portrait of the alienated white is Myra Van der Merwe, one of the central characters in Song of the City. Myra and her husband, Hendrik Van der Merwe have different attitudes and values; consequently, their love fails to endure. As the Minister for Native Affairs, Van der Merwe bows to the antisemitism and anglophobia of his Afrikaner constituency and votes in favour of South Africa's neutrality in the Second World War. His colour prejudice becomes obvious when his retarded relative, Uys, begets a child with Dick Nduli's sister: "Van der Merwe stood up and paced up and down the room. God, the horror of it all! Uys and a black woman with a bastard child....What can one do? Kill the child. Kill the woman. Kill Uys.

Jesus, tell me why life is such a filthy cesspool sometimes" (Song, p. 125). If Van der Merwe is attached to South Africa, his attachment is only to Afrikanerdom and the land. By contrast, Myra is not a bigot. She is able to step outside the boundaries of race and relate humanely with her rheumatic Coloured housemaid: "I tell you what I'll do, Maggie, I'll write to my grandmother in England. She's about ninety or so and she's had rheumatism and is very clever about such things..." (Song, p. 31). Shortly before she leaves South Africa for England, she says to the maid, "You've helped me very much, Maggie. I will miss you so" (Song, p. 160). To the news of Uys's death, Myra's reaction is one of sympathetic concern, not one of horror and shame: "'But what's going to become of the child?' She asked. He [Van der Merwe] said nothing. 'If it inherits Uys's mental weakness who's going to look after it?' Again he said nothing. For the rest of the way they were silent" (Song, p. 156).

Myra's humaneness makes her unable to belong in South Africa for which her love is not, like her husband's, merely geographical or limited to her own language group. Whereas Van der Merwe is interested in his "duty," Myra places human beings above politics and misguided patriotism. Van sees South Africa's position on the Second World War as "a question of neutrality, of either taking sides with Democracy or staying out of the war"; to his wife, on the other hand, "It's a question of sitting on the fence while thousands and thousands are killed" (Song, p. 81). It is significant that, even when the tensions in South Africa make her long for England, Myra still affirms her emotional commitment to the mystical bond that links human beings everywhere: "Not Africa. Not England. Not English people or Afrikaner people. Just a world. And just people..." (Song, p. 134). Also significant is Van der Merwe's belated realisation that, after Myra leaves, not even group solidarity can save him from losing his sense of belonging: "Ahead lay the lonely road; for love was still there. And love separated meant lonely road" (Song, p. 167).

Does Peter Abrahams see communism as an ideology which has the potential for restoring freedom and dignity to the deprived and alienated people of South Africa? It is important to refute the argument of some commentators that he does in his early work. Between Abrahams's teen-age years in South Africa and the immediate aftermath of the 1948 elections, the Communist Party was the only forum in the country where whites and non-whites could effectively organise to fight apartheid. (After the Communist Party was banned, Alan Paton's multiracial Liberal Party took its place until the Liberal Party was also proscribed in 1968 by the Prohibition of Political Interference Act.) In Song of the City, Dick Nduli and other embittered city blacks flock naturally to the communist meetings of whites like Roger Jones, Lee, and Naomi Ashe. However, critics like Michael Wade, Kolawole Ogungbesan, and Donald Burness are disappointing in their failure to realise that Abrahams does not himself endorse communism anywhere in his work. In presenting communist characters in Song of the City, Abrahams is simply portraying a real aspect of the South Africa of the 1930s. Just as he found fault with communism in real-life (as we know from his autobiographical Tell Freedom), so, in Song of the City, he criticises the communist Roger Jones through Naomi Ashe. In one of those highly improbable dialogues that are painfully common in Abrahams's novels, Naomi rebukes Jones: "...everything you say comes from your head and not from your heart....Don't you sometimes long for the language of the heart?" (Song, p. 106) Through the Coloured narrator in "Lonesome," Abrahams rejects communism more explicitly. The narrator sees the communist movement as being more interested in empty slogans than in individual freedom and comfort: "...they say, 'Don't comrade; that's defeatism.' What do I care about defeatism when I am feeling lonesome? What do I care about anything when I need human companionship and sympathy and am told that all will be well after the.... What about a bit of now?" (Dark Testament, p. 59) There is a silly argument by Kolawole Ogungbesan that, in Mine Boy, Paddy O'Shea's "nickname, the 'Red One' is enough to brand him a Marxist."[14] This is like saying that the Red Cross is a Marxist organisation. Simple as it sounds, Abrahams's explanation of the reason for Paddy's nickname seems the only valid one: "His chin pushed out until his eyes were blue. And because of his mass of red hair he was called the Red One" (Mine Boy, p. 64). One may also point out that Paddy O'Shea is the only character in Mine Boy who takes the side of individual conscience against group solidarity. He tells Xuma: "I am a man first. I want you to be a man first and then a black man." A moment later, he elaborates on this: "That is the right way, Zuma. When you understand that you will be a man with freedom inside your breast. It is only those who are free inside who can free those around them" (Mine Boy, p. 237). In the struggle for human dignity and individual freedom in South Africa, Peter Abrahams places his hopes not in communism, but in people like Paddy O'Shea and Xuma. What a pity that the Xumas and the O'Sheas are too small a minority to be politically significant!

The people of South Africa have for long been denied their basic human right to marry whomever they want; specific Acts of Parliament have been created to prevent them from marrying across racial boundaries. As in the nightmarish world of Orwell's Nineteen Eight-Four, where the names and the actual functions of state ministries are contradistinctive, a number of South Africa's Acts of Parliament are deliberate misnomers: the Extension of University Education Act does not promote university education, but denies many qualified black students the right to attend the "open universities" of Witwatersrand and Cape Town; the Citizenship Act deprives certain people of their South African citizenship; the Publications and Entertainment Act is used to censor books and films which the government considers politically undesirable; and the Industrial Conciliation Act (conciliation, mind you) is used to enforce the racial segregation of trade unions. Relevant to the discussion of human dignity and personal freedom in this chapter is the most notorious of these deceptively named Acts of Parliament, the Immorality Act, passed in 1927 and amended in 1950. Characteristically, South Africa's Immorality Act has nothing to do with immorality or rectitude.

Miscegenation between whites and blacks in seventeenth century South Africa is the reason for the original existence of the Cape Coloured population. The belief is fashionable among many South African whites that the white blood in the Cape Coloured is not that of permanent white settlers, but only that of passing sailors and soldiers. However, as Alan Paton remarks in his autobiography, Towards the Mountain, "our Immorality Act was not made for passing soldiers and sailors, though it catches quite a few."[19] Paton is here referring to the Immorality Act of 1927 which forbade extramarital sexual relations between whites and blacks, but which Dr. D. F. Malan's National party, on winning the 1948 elections, considered inadequate. To extend the basic law of immorality, Malan's government introduced two companion pieces of legislation: the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 which prohibits marriage, even if solemnised, between the races, and the 1950 Immorality Amendment Act which makes sexual relations between whites and all non-whites legally punishable.

This South Africa, where unnatural laws of "immorality" govern human conduct, is the incredible reality which informs Abrahams's fictional treatment of the theme of miscegenation. However, as is evident in one short story in Dark Testament, miscegenation was socially unacceptable in South Africa before the time of the first Immorality Act. Set in the year 1915, "From an Unfinished Novel" tells of a white man's seduction of an educated Bantu lady, Jane, and of the subsequent hypocrisy and cruelty of the white priest in whose diocese she lives. Jane becomes pregnant and the priest, Father John, fires her from her teaching job. One of the nuns, Sister Matilda, tells Jane, "Father has been kind enough to allow you to stay here until it is over.... And then you must leave" (Dark Testament, p. 135). For as long as Jane remains in the community, she must do well to remember to have nothing to do with the students and the college staff. Now, if Jane had had a sexual relationship outside marriage with a man of her own colour, she would undoubtedly have been subjected to some corrective action. However, it is the fact that Jane has had sexual intercourse with a white man that makes Father John intent on separating her from the pair of Coloured twins she has begotten: "I want you to understand this. The thing is, you've got to leave the children alone, and not come back to them. It would be best if you go away from here for good" (Dark Testament, p. 137).

That this punishment of Jane is necessary in a society which is intolerant of miscegenation, Doris Lessing's novel, The Grass is Singing, also makes clear. If, in "From an Unfinished Novel," the white community's abhorrence of miscegenation is seen in its rejection and exile of a "guilty" black woman, in The Grass is Singing, this hostility to interracial affairs is evident in the white community's isolation of a "guilty" white woman whom it also tries to banish from its midst. With catastrophic gradualism, the zoomagnetism between Mary Turner and her black servant Moses gains intensity until that potentially tragic moment when, through the eyes of the character Tony, Doris Lessing suggests that Mary has violated one of the most important "don'ts" of her community. As Tony peeps into Mary's bedroom, "...she [Mary] stood up and held out her arms while the native slipped her dress over them from behind.... Moses was buttoning up the dress; she was looking in the mirror. The attitude of the native was of an indulgent uxoriousness."[20] The discovery shocks Tony even as his "'progressiveness' was deliciously flattered by this evidence of white ruling-class hypocrisy."[21] While he is capable of believing that sex with a person of black colour "would be rather like having a relation with an animal,"[22] he cannot help admiring such an audacious thing as Mary's intimate relationship with her black servant. In these ponderings of Tony, however, Lessing does no more than show how a confused and inconsistent young white liberal reacts to miscegenation. Tony's ambiguous behaviour is not representative of his community's unwavering hostility to people involved in interracial relationships. He is himself out of place among the conservative farmers who, without the certain knowledge that he has of Mary's act, nevertheless condemn her on mere suspicion. It is the rough Charlie Slatter who, like Father John in Abrahams's short story, personifies white vengeance against miscegenists. On a visit to the Turners, Charlie notices that Mary addresses Moses "with exactly the same flirtatious coyness with which she had spoken to himself."[23] The boldness and the self-assurance with which the black servant responds to Mary's commands are enough to confirm Charlie's suspicion that there is a relationship between the two. He tells Mary's husband, Dick, to "Get rid of that boy."[24] Then, like Father John in Abrahams's story, Charlie suggests that the "guilty" ones (Dick Turner is "guilty" by association) leave the district. He says to Dick, "I'll buy your farm from you and you can stay here as manager, Turner. But you must go away first for a holiday, for at least six months. You must get your wife away."[25]

Having noted this exposure by Abrahams and Lessing of white intolerance of miscegenation in Southern Africa, one may justifiably complain that the intimate interracial relationships portrayed in "From an Unfinished Novel" and The Grass is Singing are mere affairs of lust in which whites and blacks are driven by the crudest hormonal forces toward each other. It is almost as if there cannot be heart-felt love (of which, admittedly, sex is often a part) between members of different races. Abrahams himself must have been dissatisfied with his handling of the miscegenation theme in "From an Unfinished Novel." Otherwise, it is doubtful that he would have written The Path of Thunder, his most extensive treatment of the subject, a novel in which he emphasises not interracial sex, but interracial love.

Abrahams finished writing The Path of Thunder in January 1946, three years before the Mixed Marriages Act was passed and four years before the time of the

Immorality Amendment Act. That the action is set in the days of the original Immorality Act we know because, as a university student in Cape Town, the novel's hero, Lanny Swartz, attends meetings of the Non-European United Front which was formed in 1937 when the Act was a decade old. In the world of The Path, then, there is not yet a law against extra-marital sex or marriage between Coloureds and whites although there is one forbidding extramarital sex between blacks and whites. This explains the absence of policemen with arrest warrants in the novel where the miscegenists are white and Coloured. However, bearing in mind the tenaciously enforced reality of the 1927 Immorality Act, the writer of The Path could not have failed to realise that it was only a matter of time before the South African government came out with a more thorough legalisation of its denial of a human being his natural right to express interracial love and enter into interracial marriage. Just as Abrahams correctly guessed that the removal of blacks from the Cape Common roll in 1936 would usher in the removal of the Coloureds from the same common roll, so it must have been obvious to him that any law preventing a particular form of intimacy between blacks and whites would, in due time, be extended to prohibit any form of intimacy between all non-whites and whites. The parliamentary Acts which would legalise the social intolerance of Coloured-white miscegenation may not be present in the world of The Path, but they are clearly not far from it.

Lanny Swartz, the Coloured hero of The Path, is no artful seducer. At his first meeting with Sarie Villier, the novel's white heroine with whom he will very soon fall in love, Lanny bluntly criticises what appears to be her superiority complex. The meeting takes place at night and the two cannot see each other in the darkness. The moment Lanny announces his name and Sarie realises that he is the brother of her Coloured housemaid, she complains that he has just spoken to her "like that!" "Like my equal...Like a European..." (The Path, p. 45). To this, Lanny retorts "Am I supposed to be your inferior? And do Coloured people speak differently from Europeans?" (The Path, p. 45). We discern in this initial exchange between the hero and the heroine the political framework within which Abrahams dramatises the theme of interracial love. The love that is to be has inestimable political significance not only because it is, by itself, an affirmation of an aspect of humanity which apartheid denies, but also because it will be founded on racial equality. The colour prejudice evident in Sarie's feelings of superiority is not ingrained. In the scene in which she arrives just in time to save Lanny from the brutality of Gert Villier's henchmen, Sarie reveals her nature as one which is fundamentally opposed to racism. She takes Lanny to her house on the hill and gives him water to wash the blood from his face. She hesitates to dust the back of his jacket because "She was white and he was colored" (The Path, p. 65). But Sarie does not really care for her hierarchical position as a white. Her colour prejudice exists only at the level of harmless role-playing. Little wonder that "It was hard," as the novelist tells us, for her to remember it [her position as a white] all the time" (The Path, p. 65). She gives Lanny her own hand towel to wipe his face and, in the end, she brushes the dust off the back of his jacket. In effect, Sarie is, in this scene, shedding the cumbersome image of white superiority which her racial group wants all its members to defend. "By his concentration on apparently insignificant physical details [in this scene]," observes Michael Wade, "Abrahams establishes at one stroke the power as well as the absurdity of the system of prejudice which affects white South Africans in their relationships with non-whites."[26] When Abrahams notes Sarie's surprise "at herself for accepting the equality that Lanny had established between them," he paves the way for the intensification of a love relationship which is based on racial equality (The Path, p. 65).

In his justly celebrated book, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa, Claude Wauthier points out that, in societies where interracial affairs are regarded with hostility, non-whites and whites are irresistibly attracted to each other because "the greater the risk, the more tempting the stake."[27] The obvious validity of this argument does not save it from being a narrow and limited psychological interpretation of the causes of miscegenation. As is discernible in Abrahams's "From an Unfinshed Novel" and Lessing's The Grass is Singing, and as Wauthier himself observes, this idea--that "the greater the risk, the more tempting the stake"--has given rise to a stereotyped image of the protagonists in much of the creative literature on interracial romance. To depart from this practice, Abrahams is careful, in The Path, to dramatise convincingly that the growing relationship between Sarie and Lanny reveals not the slightest predisposition on their part for sexual adventure. He presents his hero and his heroine as romantics who, before they can consumate their love, must search for ways to express it. This they do as they take a stroll in the pastoral setting of the South African highveld. When Lanny stumbles and nearly falls, Sarie puts out her hand and helps steady him, and then muses, "He should take my arm..." (The Path, p. 122). Soon after, she slips her hand through his, saying "There are more stones and mounds here" (The Path, p. 123). The romantic, bucolic poetry which they recite is in harmony with the landscape about them and the love relationship in the making. Lanny murmurs, "'Piping down the valleys wild / Piping songs of pleasant glee--'" and says "It was written by a man called Blake." Sarie breaks in with "'Piper, sit thee down and write / In a book that all may read,'" and teasingly says, "And that was also written by a man called Blake. Ever heard of him?" When Sarie walks back home after their stroll, Lanny "watched till she was out of sight and till her footfalls had died away." He also reflects that "he had felt more at ease walking with her than he had been in a long time" (The Path, p. 127).

Towards the end of the novel's second section, appositely entitled "Love," Lanny and Sarie declare their love for each other. In vain has Lanny tried for four days (during which he has avoided Sarie) to disobey the dictates of his heart and to abide by his country's "written and unwritten" laws which say in effect, "There shall be no equality between black and white in church and state" (The Path, p. 149). They next meet on a little hill overlooking Stilleveld. As they stand facing each other and holding hands, the novelist tells us: "There was no need for words. No need for either of them to say 'I love you.' They knew it. In a strangely simple and elemental manner they knew it." Then Lanny kisses Sarie and "the dry choking feeling left his heart and the empty loneliness of her heart was filled" (The Path, p. 178). Abrahams never allows us to forget that the passionate expression of interracial love in South Africa is an act of political rebellion. In one of the many instances of glaring authorial intrusion in this novel, he lays bare the escapist musings of the love-stricken pair:

> Forgotten was the cardinal sin of their land, the sin condemned by everyone, from the church downward to the Labour party: the free and equal mixture of colors. Forgotten was the ugly word "miscegenation" that would be used to label their love.... Sing of love, little children. Sing of love, old men and women....Not of hate. Not of war. Tell the earth to emerge from its pains, to unfetter its chains and to sing....(The Path, p. 179)

In South Africa, this moment of happiness, this daydreaming, is bound to be ephemeral. As surely as night follows day, the Coloured Lanny and the white Sarie will be deprived the fleeting feeling that they are "alone and free and happy..." (The Path, p. 179). In Athol

Fugard's play, The Blood Knot, a Coloured young man warns his brother who toys with the idea of a white female pen-pal: "Maybe, just maybe, when the lights are out, when you are alone in the darkest hour of the night, then, just maybe, a man can dream that one for a little while. But remember, that even then, wherever you lie, breathing fast and dreaming, God's watching with His Secret Eye to see how far you go!"[28] The painful truth will dawn on Sarie and Lanny that, by loving across the colour bar, they have placed themselves in the "path of thunder" which will strike sooner or later. Herein lies the meaning of the novel's title, a phrase taken from the last stanza of the poem, "Tableau," written by the black American poet Countee Cullen:

> Oblivious to look and word
> They pass, and see no wonder
> That lightning brilliant as a sword
> Should blaze the path of thunder.[29]

During the 1930-1950 period, the main refuge of South Africa's persecuted interracial lovers was Portuguese East Africa where "miscegenation was an integral part of colonial policy."[30] It is to this region that Lanny and Sarie attempt to escape when they sense that they are in danger from Gert Villier. On their way to catch the train for Cape Town, they are surprised by Gert and his thug Viljoen. This confrontation precipitates the catastrophe which is a gangster movie affair. In The Path, it is "the voices of the guns" which finally express white South Africa's repugnance of interracial love: Lanny and Sarie die in a shoot-out with Viljoen and his men. But it is the press which articulates the unwillingness of the country's whites to admit that love is possible between whites and the darker races. Once "white civilization admits this," says Doris Lessing, "it crashes, and nothing can save it."[31] The day after Lanny and Sarie have been slain, the Eastern Post carries a front page story which tells of how a young Coloured teacher "had run amok, killed a prominent farmer," and shot Miss Sarie Villier. The story ends "with a strong protest against educating black people" (The Path, "Epilogue"). In Lessing's The Grass is Singing, the attitude of the local press is similar. At the beginning of the novel's first chapter, which really functions either as the last chapter or the epilogue, there is a brief newspaper report on the murder of Mary Turner which does not mention the sexual relationship which had existed between this ill-fated woman and the native servant who kills her. According to this report, Moses kills Mary because "he was in search of valuables."[32] Such vituperative misrepresentation of the facts is not just a desperate attempt to protect the myth of forbidden love, it is also a threat to the very concept of objective truth in apartheid South Africa and in what was once Rhodesia.

The man called Mad Sam could have told Lanny Swartz that, by continuing a love affair with a white girl, Lanny's life would end in violence and tragedy. Indeed, as Kolawole Ogungbesan points out, "Mad Sam's story provides a sub-plot to the main story, a forewarning of the fate that awaits Lanny and all those who assault the South African racial barrier."[33] In the world which predates the one presented in The Path, Sam had loved another Sarie whom Gert Villier had hoped to marry. Sam's love had been returned but Gert's had been unrequited. This had so incensed Gert that he had assaulted Sam brutally. In the fight scene towards the novel's end, as he holds Lanny's neck in a vice, Gert gloats: "I'm going to kick you and kick you till you are like Sam.... he was like you. Thought he was good enough for a white woman" (The Path, p. 275). Gert had physically reduced the once handsome and rich Sam Du Plessis to the pathetic creature known as Mad Sam. Here is Sam as he appears in The Path, a living reminder to all non-whites to beware of human relationships of the forbidden kind: "The right side of his head had been crushed in, as though by a boot. Most of the ribs in the right side of his chest were broken. His right arm was broken in many places. There was an ugly and bleeding gash in his right groin" (The Path, p. 56). The undisguisedly violent rejection of miscegenists that we see in The Path is absent from Athol Fugard's play, Statements after an Arrest Under the Immorality Act, where we are more obviously in the world of Nineteen Eighty-Four with all its totalitarian sophistication. In Fugard's world, ordinary citizens and the police (who exhibit characteristics of that abnormal Orwellian reality called the "Thought Police") collaborate to enforce the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 which includes Coloured-white miscegenation in the list of illegal relationships. Unlike Gert Villier in The Path, Mrs. Tienie Buys in Statements has no need to take the law into her hands because South Africa now has legislation under which "justice" can be administered to a white woman and a Coloured man who have sexual intercourse with each other. To Detective Sergeant J. du Preez, Mrs. Buys reports the secret romance between the Coloured man Errol Philander and the white woman Frieda Joubert. Mrs. Buys, whose house is behind the library run by Joubert, has had the library under her personal surveillance for one and a half years. In her signed statements to the police, she describes the pattern of Philander's comings and goings between "a night in June last year..." and "today...December the seventeenth."[34] "I am prepared," she declares, "to repeat this statement under oath in Court."[35] To obtain the photographic evidence which would facilitate the efficient prosecution of the "guilty" ones, Sergeant du Preez decides that a camera should be hidden in the library where Philander and Joubert commit "the suspected offence."[36] When the police finally make their move, they could not have chosen a better moment at which to surprise their victims. Philander is seen, the stage directions tell us, "scrambling for his trousers..." and Joubert is "naked, crawling around on the floor...."[37] Whereas, in The Path, white violence against interracial lovers is rough and ready, in Fugard's play, it is refined and nearly invisible.

However, the patient and methodical efficiency with which the police catch Joubert and Philander should not be allowed to obscure the inevitably violent end of these victims of apartheid. The Philander we see at the end of Statements is as pathetic a human being as the Winston Smith who, in Nineteen Eighty-Four, emerges from the torture chambers of Big Brother. In an extended soliloquy, Philander laments his condition at the end of the play: "I can see. / I can taste. / I can smell. / I can hear. / I can't love."[38] Then he makes more plain the fact that he has been castrated: "...on the night of January the twelfth 1966, I...who had been made in his image...did lose a part of me. They did it I say. They dug a hole and buried it. Ask the dogs...."[39] For Philander and Lanny, then, the end is similarly violent. Lanny dies in heroic resistance while Philander lives on as a miserable, frightened, and incomplete man. That the ends of Philander and Lanny are in tune with the fates of the protagonists in the real-life dramas of miscegenation in present-day South Africa, many factual stories help to show. One such report appeared in the Guardian Weekly of 7 September 1974. It told of the "suicide of a 20-year-old Coloured boy in Cape Town" who "threw himself under a train...when he learnt his white girlfriend was pregnant." At the time of his death, the boy had a total sum of 30 rand which he left his girlfriend to "help her to buy clothes for the baby." However, "The girl's father took the money and used it to pay for an abortion--a legal abortion could be obtained because the father was Coloured." The report did not reveal the boy's identity "because his family is leading an illegal try-for-white existence." Before the boy's death, not even the girlfriend, seventeen-year-old Sonya Shepherd, knew about his Coloured identity. She said afterwards: "I did not know my boyfriend was Coloured. The first I knew was when the police told me. It would not have made the slightest difference. If only he had known that. We could have run away to another country and got married and lived a normal life away from apartheid." The Coloured boy's suicide and the white girl's sorrow aside, what made this incident "an apartheid tragedy almost unparalleled in South Africa's history" was the pain and the frustration that attended the determination of the boy's parents to lead "an illegal try-for-white existence." The boy's parents could not send their children, who had Coloured birth certificates, to a white school. Apart from the fact that the children would have been refused admission, the exposure of their Coloured identities would also have led to the expulsion of their family from the white suburb in which they lived and to the loss of their white friends. Even more tragic was the fact that, when the boy died, he could neither be buried in a white cemetery (as the police now knew he was Coloured) nor in a Coloured cemetery (because his family's white friends would have asked why). "So," says the Guardian Weekly Report, "he was cremated and the ashes put in an urn."[40]

In her undying love for the Coloured Lanny, the heroine of The Path is, like the Sarie before her, a "new Desdemona."[41] Even when she realises that she must pay an exacting price for partaking of a forbidden love, Sarie remains steadfast in her devotion to Lanny. Like Desdemona, who cast aside all considerations of kindred and colour and followed her Moorish lover to the island of Cyprus, Sarie is prepared to follow Lanny anywhere and to suffer poverty if necessary (The Path, p. 257). Sarie is a romantic descendant of Desdemona because, like the sixteenth century Venetian lass, she is constant in her love for a man of different race--a love which hangs in a vacuum without any solid support in the world in which it exists. It is evidence of Shakespeare's remarkable understanding of human nature that, long before the idea of sexual attraction between the races became so overworked in fiction as to stimulate a creative reaction from writers like Abrahams, he understood that true love, as opposed to mere sexual attraction, could exist between a Venetian girl and a Moor from Mauritania. A good three centuries before non-whites became a permanent and an active part of western society, before the segregation laws of the United States and the apartheid policies of South

Africa, Shakespeare understood that when a non-white became the lover of a coveted white lady, he inevitably aroused extreme feelings of hatred in some whites. If we are not disposed to take seriously Iago's description of Othello as "an old black ram"[42] and as a "Barbary horse,"[43] we can at least take seriously the impression of the senator Brabantio that Othello is "an abuser of the world"[44] and that for Desdemona to love such a man is "For nature so preposterously to err...."[45] In all of Venice, with the possible exception of Michael Cassio, Desdemona is the only person who sees "Othello's visage in his mind...."[46]

Shakespeare's liberal imagination shocked many eighteenth and nineteenth century critics of Othello. In spite of the abundant textual evidence of Othello's colour, some of these critics could not tolerate the idea that Othello who was a Moor could also be black. The great actor Edmund Kean "regarded it as a gross error to make Othello either a negro or a black, and accordingly altered the conventional black to the light brown which distinguishes the Moors by virtue of their descent from the Caucasian race."[47] Frederick William Hawkins, the biographer of Kean, added that "Although...Othello is described with a minuteness which leaves no doubt that Shakespeare intended him to be black, there is no reason to suppose that the Moors were darker than the generality of Spaniards...."[48] Charles Knight, the Victorian publisher and eminent editor of Shakespeare, complained that the Moors,"the descendants of the proud Arabs...were confounded with the uncivilised African, the despised slave."[49] The critic Henry Reed considered "The repulsive notion that Othello was a black--a coarse-featured African--" to be "directly at variance with the requisitions of both poetry and history."[50] Coleridge's point-of-view was little different: "...as we are consitituted and most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning ~~of~~ the seventeenth century, it would be something monstrous to conceive of this beautiful English girl [sic] falling in love with a veritable negro."[51] Either these reknowned scholars did not know or they did not care to acknowledge that Mauritania (Othello's native country) is borderd by the predominantly black countries of Senegal and Mali and does have black as well as light-skinned Moors. John Quincy Adams, a former president of the United States, had no doubts about Othello's race; he denounced Desdemona for marrying a "rude unbleached African."[52] In the comments of another American on the play, those of the critic Mary Preston, we see an unsurpassable example of the racist criticism of literature:

> In studying the play of Othello, I have always imagined its hero a white man. It is true that the dramatist paints him black, but this shade does not suit the man. It is a stage decoration which my taste discards; a fault of colour from an artistic point of view. I have, therefore, as I before stated in my readings of the play, dispensed with it.... We may regard,... the daub of black upon Othello's portrait as an ebullition of fancy, a freak of imgination--...one of the few erroneous strokes of the great master's brush, the single blemish on a faultless work.[53]

Clearly Shakespeare was too liberal not only for his day but also for the critics of succeeding centuries. Bradley had such critics in mind when he said, "We do not like the real Shakepeare"; all we delight in is "to have his language pruned and his conceptions flattened into something that suits our mouths and our minds."[54]

For all its racial prejudice, the sixteenth century Venice presented in Othello was significantly more tolerant of miscegenation than the twentieth century South Africa presented in creative literature. Although the Duke's vindication of Othello's interracial marriage in the Venetian Council Chamber probably reflected the senator's perception of Othello's usefulness to the state and not his recognition of Othello as a man who was equal in every respect, the vindication sprang from an extremely liberal attitude nevertheless. It must have been the liberalism of this fictional Venice that appealed to the young Abrahams when a young Jewish girl read to him from Lamb's Tales from Shakespear. "The story of Othello," Abrahams remembers in Tell Freedom, "jumped at me and invaded my heart and mind as the young woman read. I was transported to the land where the brave Moor lived and loved and destroyed his love."

In his exploration of the specific theme of miscegenation, as in his handling of the subject of deprivation generally, Abrahams's inability to delineate his white characters psychologically and empathetically is apparent. In "From an Unfinished Novel," he does not provide the slightest glimpse of the mind of the white man James Martin. In fact, Martin disappears from the story after he has had sex with the Bantu lady. Abrahams does a little better in The Path where he attempts to present Sarie's mental processes through interior monologue. However, a psychological presentation of a character cannot be limited to a mere reproduction of the rhythm of the character's feelings and thoughts. We need to see the character driven to some kind of action, however inconsequent, by the impact of social pressure on his mind. Before the catastrophe at the novel's end, Sarie suffers but little. And she suffers because she stands in the line of fire between her racial group and her lover, not because her society sees her as a principal in a "crime." For a white insider's portrait of a white miscegenist under strong social and psychological pressure, we must turn to another South African novel, Too Late the Phalarope, by Alan Paton. The moment the young Afrikaner police lieutenant, Pieter van Vlaanderen, succumbs to a sudden surge of lust and has sexual intercourse with the licentious black girl, Stephanie, he prosecutes and condemns himself. He is truly horrified and ashamed of his own deed. Earlier, when he catches a white boy chasing Stephanie, he asks the boy, "You know the Immorality Act?"[55] and then proceeds to tell him: "It's [interracial sex is] a thing that's never forgiven, never forgotten. The court may give you a year, two years. But outside it's a sentence for life...."[56] After the boy leaves, van Vlaanderen prays that "God have mercy on him."[57] In a psychological analysis of the lieutenant's character, the first important point is that, despite his liberalism and general magnanimity, he is convinced in his own mind that sex with a black person is wrong. This statement is supported by evidence that is scattered at intervals throughout the novel and which is especially abundant from Chapter XX onwards.

Even before he actually has carnal knowledge of Stephanie, van Vlaanderen is truly baffled by the realisation that he can feel sexual desire for a black girl. "How I wondered at myself," he notes in his secret diary, "that I who shrank from any dirty joke, and was so fussy about my body and clothes...should be tempted by such a thing...."[58] Much earlier, he records how "I was tempted by what I hated...," and how he longs for "a salvation" that will "make me clean and sweet and at peace...."[59] After he has had sex with Stephanie, he sees his "crime" in characteristically religious terms. As soon as the girl leaves the scene of their act, van Vlaanderen has a vision that the doors of Heaven have been closed to him, "that no prayer might enter in from such a man, who knowing the laws and the commandments, had, of his own choice and will, defied them."[60] Clearly, the lieutenant's sense of his sin precedes his fear of discovery. His two reactions to his deed--his sense of having offended God and his awareness that he has violated an important law of apartheid--are indicated in the order in which they occur in the following sentence: "And while he was praying, if he might pray, he heard a twig crack loudly in the vacant ground, and was filled with terror."[61]

Nevertheless, when van Vlaanderen's fear of the discovery of his "crime" by his society comes, it almost completely overshadows his dread of God's punishment. When he arrives home from the scene of his "crime," he finds on his door a note which says "I SAW YOU."[62] To illustrate the psychological effect of this note on the lieutenant, Paton presents van Vlaanderen's reaction to the note in great detail. The lieutenant "closed his hand over the paper as though someone might see it in that empty house...," carries it into his study and shuts the door. He studies the note and observes that it is anonymous, "unruled and clean," and that it has "three small words, seven letters, enough to destroy a world." Although the curtains of the study are drawn, "he held his hand folded over the paper..." for he imagines himself in a town "suddenly full of eyes, that could see in the dark of night, and the thoughts that moved in the darkness of men's minds."[63] When he hears a car outside, he is "filled again with terror" and he "put the note between the pages of a book, and put the book in the bookcase." After he has gone to all this trouble, he realises that the car has stopped not before his house, "but half a block away."[64] For a brief moment, he tries to evade painful reality by allowing himself to think that his unknown enemy might not have any solid evidence against him. However, he suddenly remembers the "dogs from Sonop" which can be used to smell and unearth evidence and his fear returns. The note turns out to be a harmless little prank; its importance lies in the whole incident through which Paton succeeds in painting a vivid picture of a fear-ridden mind.

Van Vlaanderen's psychological reactions are rooted in very real social pressure. His is a world which lives by "the iron law that no white man might touch a black woman, nor might any white woman be touched by a black man." All violators of this law are "broken and destroyed" by its protectors.[65] One such protector is van Vlaanderen's father-in-law who, when he hears of the lieutenant's deed, "struck the arm of his chair" and threatens to shoot the offender "like a dog."[66] However, the most zealous upholder of this law is none other than the lieutenant's own father, old Jakob van Vlaanderen. Upon learning of his son's offence, Jakob van Vlaanderen has the family Bible brought to him "and he crossed out the name of Pieter van Vlaanderen from the Book...."[67] The old man commands that everything in his house that has anything to do with his son be burned and destroyed. He also tells the members of his household that Pieter's "name must never again be spoken in that house, nor any likeness of him be seen there...."[68] Finally, Jakob van Vlaanderen invokes upon his son the wrath of the Hundred and Ninth psalm: "'When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin...."[69]

Indisputably, the work of a white South African writer like Alan Paton helps to illuminate Abrahams's unsuccessful presentation of the psychological undercurrents in South Africa's white society. However, the same work also provides a useful background against which we can see with greater clarity Abrahams's insightful portrayal of the general non-white attitude to miscegenation. For a novel about white-black miscegenation, Too Late the Phalarope relegates the black segment of South Africa's population to too shadowy a background. The only visible black person, the girl Stephanie, is no more than a useful functionary in the hands of Paton. Her whole character is built around her concern for the safety of her illegitimate child in whose name she betrays her benefactor, van Vlaanderen, and commits offences which make a jailbird of her. We do not know what she thinks of herself, of the black community of which she is a part, or of the white society with which destiny has given her an irrevocable relationship. In the end, her important role in the plot notwithstanding, this girl remains as mysterious to the reader as she evidently is to her white creator. Unlike Paton, the Coloured Abrahams has an unquestionable ability to evoke the community life and enter the minds of his non-white characters. In "From an Unfinished Novel," Abrahams reveals the racist foundations of a young black man's sexual jealousy. As the native watches the black girl Jane yield to the sexual advances of the white James Martin, "Thoughts of murder passed through his mind.... They [white men] were not satisfied with stealing our land and cattle. They must also steal our women with sweet words.... God, I hate them..." (Dark Testament, p. 127). In A Wreath for Udomo, the formidable Selina refuses to treat Tom Lanwood with favour because, unlike Udomo, Adebhoy, Mhendi and Mabi, Lanwood has been "guilty" of interracial love in London. When Mhendi volunteers the information that it is not only Lanwood but all of them who have had affairs with white women in London, Selina retorts: "That is not what I mean. You and Udomo and Adebhoy had them [white women] to sleep with, but always your hearts were in Africa...."[70] She is, of course, referring to and angered by the fact that

Lanwood's relationship with the English woman, Mary Feld, has not been one merely of casual sex, but a twenty-year-old love affair. Selina is a bigot, and she does not receive approbation from Abrahams any more than do white characters of the likes of Father John and Gert Villier. "Prejudice is prejudice," says Abrahams in an essay on the African writer, "whether it comes from a black or a white, and I, as a writer, am the sworn enemy of all racial and tribal prejudice whether in black or white."[71] Indeed, to the charming and cunning black man who seduces a white woman as a form of psychological revenge for his oppressed race, Abrahams delivers a stern warning in This Island Now: "He was the kind who would get everything except the very last bit. Right at the end of the line he would be alone, probably sick and starving and with nowhere to shelter, deserted by his charm, and no woman to hold his hand. There would be a desperate loneliness to his dying...."[72]

To speak of the non-white attitude to miscegenation is to discuss the racism of South Africa's non-Europeans so generally as to obscure its hierarchical nature. The battle line between all the non-whites on one side and all the whites on the other is only one of many. All is not well within the non-European front. In the South Africa of the thirties, perhaps more than in today's South Africa, there seemed to have been an inclination by the members of one group to discriminate against the groups which occupied the lower rungs of the racial ladder. This observation would seem to be contradicted by the discussion in the preceding paragraph which dealt with the racism of the group on the lowest rung, that of the blacks against the whites. In reality, however, there is no contradiction here, for it is conceivable that a racial group which has more economic and political clout than another will have the capacity for a more active expression of its prejudices against the less powerful group. At an individual level, the blacks may express racist feelings and perform racist acts but, as a group, they do not have the power which would enable them to enforce their prejudices. By contrast, the white group, privileged economically and politically, is able to discriminate against all the other groups efficiently. In Abrahams's work, the Coloureds and the Indians, in their turn, actively scorn romantic relationships with blacks. On the subject of non-white racism, Abrahams's life informs his fiction very directly. For the first twenty years of his life, he was a member of the Transvaal Coloured population and, shortly before he sailed for England, he spent some time with the Indians of Durban. When, after fifteen years in England, he returned to South Africa on assignment from the London Observer, Abrahams found himself at loggerheads with some educated members of the Coloured community who could not believe in his idea of a world without colour. Here are portions of a conversation which took place between Abrahams and some Coloured teachers during the former's painful return to South Africa.

> Second Teacher: I met a Native fellow who said you belong to them more than to us.
> Abrahams: I'm glad he said so.
> Second Teacher: Why? Aren't you proud of being Coloured?
> Abrahams: No.
> Third Teacher: Do you mean to say you are ashamed of your own people, Mr. Abrahams?
> Abrahams: No, not ashamed.
> Third Teacher: But not proud?
> Abrahams: Yes, not proud. I'm not proud of prejudiced people, whether they be Black or White or Brown. In the Coloured cinemas, you people practise a colour bar against the Blacks. You segregate them into separate seats. I've heard of the Black B.A. who has a Coloured girl-friend. Every time they go to the pictures the girl goes to the Coloured part and he has to go to the inferior part set aside for Black.
> Second Teacher: Do you approve of that girl having a Black boyfriend?
> Abrahams: If she wants him, yes.
> Second Teacher: Would you approve if she were your sister?
> Abrahams: If he is a good man and they really love each other, I would be proud of her for seeing the man beneath the skin. Are you against that girl having a Black boy-friend?
> Second Teacher: I am....
> Eldest Teacher: ....You say you yourself would not object to your sister marrying a Black man. Would you yourself marry a Black woman?
> Abrahams: I would. I asked a Black girl to marry me once. I didn't marry her because she wouldn't have me.... But now let me ask you something. If that Coloured girl had a White boy-friend instead of a Black one, would you still object?
> Eldest Teacher: That isn't quite the same. (Goli, pp. 69-72)

The fictional parallels of these prejudiced Coloured teachers are very identifiable in the short story, "Saturday Night." They are those who, after a member of a Coloured tenants' association has called for non-European unity, grumble about "'[a Kaffir's] wanting to marry my daughter,' and about a 'Kaffir's one leg being in the bush'" (Goli, p. 68). In The Path of Thunder, the Coloured preacher of Stilleveld endorses the view, invented by the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church, that "God made white and colored and black...He made them different because He wanted them to be different. It is His will that colored people should live and work and learn among colored people. If it was not so He would have made us all the same" (The Path, p. 41). Dicky Naicker, the young Indian revolutionary in A Night of Their Own, is not free of the racism of which he is ashamed. When he realises that the Indian girl Dee Nunkhoo has fallen in love and had sex with the black Richard Nkosi, he breaks down and weeps: "The doc's kid sister...giving it to the black man like she hungry.... Why not me?...I'm not black...."[73] It may be said, then, that, in recognising racism in all South Africa's racial groups, and not merely the conspicuous and dominant racism of the whites, Abrahams responds to this notorious South African evil not with the stark partiality of the slogan-mongering non-white politician, but with the refreshing objectivity of the creative writer. "The Coloured people have sharp racial attitudes," he notes in Return to Goli, "They look down on the Blacks and aspiringly up to the Whites. And they would, doubtlessly, practise as rigid a colour bar against the Blacks if they were up there with the Whites" (Goli, p. 63). This observation is lent credence in Richard Rive's short story, "Resurrection," where unbelievably blatant discrimination is pratised by three light-skinned Coloured children against their mother and sister who are both dark-skinned. When the story opens, the four children sit around the coffin of their now dead mother, and the life of their family is recounted through the unhappy reminiscences of the dark-skinned daughter, Mavis. We learn that the three light-skinned children do not want their white friends who visit them to see Mavis and their mother; they order their own mother and sister to "stay in the kitchen and use the back door."[74] Since the three children are trying to "pass for white," it will not do for their visiting white friends to see their mother's dark-skinned friends. Therefore, the three children tell their mother's friends not to visit her. The three light-skinned children in Rive's story belong to the Coloured people whom Abrahams has classified as "The fairest, those with the straightest hair and most 'European' features" and as those who "form the social elite" (Goli, p. 63). "It is from... the social elite, " says Abrahams, "that Coloureds 'pass' into the White group. If the 'passing' is successful even the parents of the passer cease to know him or her" (Goli, p. 64).

Abrahams's treatment of the specific theme of miscegenation is, like his exploration of the general subject of deprivation, an attempt to dramatise in manageable proportions the larger theme of racism in South Africa. In the main, he is concerned with the dominant racism, that of the whites. He shows that, before the laws against miscegenation were passed, white social intolerance of interracial affairs was unmistakable. It would seem that racist legislation springs from racist attitudes and not vice versa. One cannot therefore applaud the South African government's recent decision to scrap the Mixed Marriages and the Immorality Acts.[75] Racism has eaten into the fabric of South African society, and there is absolutely no reason to accept Mphahlele's observation in The African Image that "intermarriage between races in South Africa..." has "a better chance of success than anywhere else on this continent...."[76] Abrahams is also concerned with the racism of the darker races, and in this he proves to be an impartial teller of the South African story. Michael Wade has written of Abrahams that "What is most apparent about his fiction is the complete sincerity and honesty of the author."[77] Abrahams goes beyond the well-known racism of the whites to give us an insider's view of non-white racism which is often unknown to the outsider. He dissects the racism of his own racial group, the Coloured people, nearly as extensively as he does that of the whites. In A Night of Their Own, he introduces the subject of the slaughter of Indians by blacks in the late forties and, through the character of Dr. Nunkhoo, reasons that "given the same circumstances, the Indians or the blacks would have behaved exactly as the white minority does..." (A Night, p. 72). Abrahams was still not satisfied with his performance as a writer after he had comprehensively treated the interrelated subjects of deprivation, miscegenation, and racism. He now wanted to take of things a historical view, what he and Alan Paton call "the long view." "I felt," he writes in Return to Goli, "that if I could see the whole scheme of things with the long eye of history I might be able to fit the problems of my own group into the general human scheme and, in doing so, become a writer" (Goli, p. 17). The next two chapters examine Abrahams's search, through his fiction, for an historical perspective.

Notes

[1] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1942), p.10. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[2] Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 370.

[3] Peter Abrahams, Mine Boy (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1946), p. 81. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[4] Peter Abrahams The Path of Thunder (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948), p. 53. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[5] Michael Wade, Peter Abrahams (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1972), p. 65.

[6] Peter Abrahams, "The Peurto Ricans," Holiday, 29 (February, 1961), p. 138.

[7] Peter Abrahams, Return to Goli (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 55. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[8] Professor Herbert Tingsten, The Problem of South Africa, trans. Daniel Viklund (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1955), p. 32.

[9] Tingsten, p. 32.

[10] Peter Abrahams, Song of the City (London: Dorothy Crisp and Co., Ltd., 1945), p. 40. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[11] Alan Paton, Cry the Beloved Country (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 4.

[12] Wade, p. 33.

[13] Andre Brink, "Mahatma Gandhi Today," in Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 62.

[14] Brink, "Mahatma Gandhi Today," p. 62.

[15] Nadine Gordimer, The Lying Days (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), p. 26.

[16] Cosmo Pieterse, "Last Letter," in Present Lives Future Becoming, by Cosmo Pieterse and others (Guildford, Surrey: Hickey Press Ltd., 1974), p. 85.

[17] Andre Brink, "After Soweto," in Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege, p. 144.

[18] Kolawole Ogungbesan, The Writing of Peter Abrahams (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 46.

[19] Alan Paton, Towards the Mountain: An Autobiography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 16.

[20] Doris Lessing, The Grass is Singing (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1950), p. 230.

[21] Lessing, p. 230.

[22] Lessing, p. 231.

[23] Lessing, p. 219.

[24] Lessing, p. 220.

[25] Lessing, p. 221.

[26] Wade, p. 69.

[27] Claude Wauthier, The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press Inc., 1979), p. 183.

[28] Athol Fugard, The Blood Knot, in Boesman and Lena and Other Plays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 46.

[29] Countee Cullen, "Tableau," in Color (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1925), p. 12.

[30] Wauthier, p. 180.

[31] Lessing, p. 30.

[32] Lessing, p. 9.

[33] Ogungbesan, p. 57.

[34] Athol Fugard, Statements after an Arrest Under the Immorality Act, in Statements (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 94 and 95.

[35] Fugard, Statements, p. 95.

[36] Fugard, Statements, p. 95.

[37] Fugard, Statements, p. 96.

[38] Fugard, Statements, p. 105.

[39] Fugard, Statements, p. 107.

[40] Stanley Uys, "Racial Love at the End of the Line," Guardian Weekly, 7 September 1974, rpt. in John Western, Outcast Cape Town (Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. vi-vii.

[41] This phrase is the title of a chapter in Claude Wauthier's book, *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa*.

[42] William Shakespeare, *Othello* I.i.88, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed., Alfred Harbage (New York: The Viking Press, 1977).

[43] Shakespeare, *Othello* I.i.111.

[44] Shakespeare, *Othello* I.ii.78.

[45] Shakespeare, *Othello* I.iii.62.

[46] Shakespeare, *Othello* I.iii.252.

[47] Horace Howard Furness, ed., *Othello: A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1963), p. 390.

[48] Furness, p. 390.

[49] Furness, p. 390.

[50] Furness, p. 393.

[51] Furness, p. 390.

[52] Furness, p. 391.

[53] Furness, p. 395.

[54] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1967), p. 202.

[55] Alan Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 13.

[56] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 16.

[57] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 18.

[58] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 124.

[59] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 80.

[60] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 154.

[61] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 154.

[62] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 156.

[63] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 157.

[64] Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*, p. 158.

[65] Paton, Too Late the Phalarope, p. 17

[66] Paton, Too Late the Phalarope, p. 265.

[67] Paton, Too Late the Phalarope, p. 250.

[68] Paton, Too Late the Phalarope, p. 251-252.

[69] Paton, Too Late the Phalarope, p. 252.

[70] Peter Abrahams, A Wreath for Udomo (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 220.

[71] Peter Abrahams, "The Long View: African Writers' Part in the Battle against Racial Prejudice," African World (June, 1952), p. 12.

[72] Peter Abrahams, This Island Now (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 82.

[73] Peter Abrahams, A Night of Their Own (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 125.

[74] Richard Rive, "Resurrection," in Modern African Prose, ed. Richard Rive (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1973), p. 58.

[75] The renunciation of the Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act took place officially in June 1985.

[76] Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 34.

[77] Wade, p. 5.

III. 'The Long Eye of History': c. 1530 - c. 1959

Abrahams's early writings, as we have seen, are primarily concerned with immediate social tragedies engendered by such realities as deprivation and miscegenation which, in the South African situation, have been exacerbated by the racial inequalities legislated by successive governments in that country. In his novels after The Path of Thunder (or from Wild Conquest onwards), however, Abrahams, while he is still interested in racial and social conditions, extends the scope of his work, geographically and chronologically. He expands his themes to encompass colonial conflict in West Africa, and racial conflict in the West Indies and the United States as well as South Africa; at the same time, he looks backward to conditions in the early sixteenth century and at various other periods in the past in order to view his main themes with considerable breadth of historical perspective.

In defining the African writer's responsibility, Peter Abrahams once said:

> It seems to me that two things are indispensable to the writer who would serve Africa's deepest needs to-day. First, he must have a sense of history. Second, he must have a sense of universal humanity. Armed with these invisible weapons, his duty to his society becomes quite clear, his terms of reference state themselves.[1]

What is a "sense of history," and what is "a sense of universal humanity"? What is the relationship between the two terms? As "invisible weapons," how different are they in the hands of a creative artist from what they are in the hands of, say, a professional historian? To these questions, the following passage from Leo Tolstoy's little book, What is Art?, contains some implicit answers: "...thanks to man's capacity to be infected with the feelings of others by means of art, all that is being lived through by his contemporaries is accessible to him, as well as the feelings experienced by men thousands of years ago, and he has also the possibility of transmitting his own feelings to others (emphasis is mine)."[2] The point Tolstoy makes is that art is the bridge which, better than any other, links past, present and future. Art is the means by which man has come closest to immortalising and universalising human feeling; about this there can be no dispute, for not all the history books in the world preserve and transmit the Victorian temperament nearly as well as Dickens's novels. The historical novelist is an artist who seeks dialogue with history in an effort to pronounce creative statements of lasting worth. He may well be less efficient than the professional historian at recording and examining factual details, but he is better fitted to bring a wider vision to bear on such aspects of the historical process as personal or group responsibility, the role of the hero, and the ministrations of providence. The present chapter and the one following it discuss Peter Abrahams as a historical novelist, as a writer who is able, in his art, to call the dead from both the distant and the recent past back to life, and who re-enacts the dramas in which the dead once featured as flesh-and-blood people. Under examination are five of Abrahams's novels--The View from Coyaba, Wild Conquest, A Wreath for Udomo, A Night of Their Own, This Island Now--which, considered together, show the novelist in a committed and honest search, through his art, for an historical perspective on some of the racial and political conflicts which rage on through the 1980s.

Abrahams delves farthest back into history in the first part of his most recent book, The View from Coyaba, published in 1985. He chooses as his starting point the story of the Arawaks, the first inhabitants of Jamaica. The Arawaks, as the novelist introduces them in the brief prologue to the first chapter, were a gentle people who were "civilised enough to show the value of leisure by inventing the hammock" and "creative enough to make songs and to play and to leave behind their artifacts."[3] These people so loved peace that they would not be without it even in death. They buried their dead in quiet, inaccessible places which they called "Coyaba," a name Abrahams has given to his house high up in Jamaica's St. Andrew hills, and the name from which the title of his novel is derived. (In Abrahams's 1965 essay, "We Can Learn to be Color-Blind," where he first uses the phrase, "the view from Coyaba," he explains that "Coyaba" means "heaven," "peace," "tranquillity.")[4] In this idyllic world of between fifty and sixty thousand Arawaks, the Spaniards under Columbus landed in 1494 and again in 1503 and, in less than fifty years, wiped the Arawaks off the face of Jamaica. It is to the Arawaks' point of view on their inevitable extermination by the Spaniards that Abrahams gives novelistic treatment in the opening section of The View from Coyaba.

The action begins in medias res, "at some point in the 1530s to 1540s" when the Spaniards have already killed all but a small number of the Arawaks (Coyaba, p. 11). The Spaniards are an invisible presence, and the dwindling Arawak community is not portrayed. Abrahams presents only two characters in dialogue, the Arawak chief priest and the Arawak high priestess; through their conversation, he weaves into the action the necessary exposition of antecedent matters. When the novel opens, the priestess climbs a hill to discuss with the oracular Cacique (the chief priest) the predicament of their race. It is significant that the two are concerned less with planning a course of action against the Spaniards than with the role of their own gods in the fate of the Arawaks. In response to the priestess, who asks what the current augury is, the Cacique compares the gods to dogs which, he believes, notice people only when they (the dogs) have nothing else to do: "There is no reason for them [the gods] to notice us anymore than my little friend [a dog] noticed you just now. The hunt was good and he had other things to do. When there is no hunt, nothing to eat and nothing else to do, he will notice you. So it is with the gods" (Coyaba, p. 14). The priestess's agony is evident in the conflict between her desire to have faith in the gods and her failure to understand the ways of providence. She protests that "The gods are not dogs," but, then, she needs answers to some very important questions: "But what are we to do? Where are we to go? Who is to guide us if, as you say, the gods do not notice us? What is the purpose of it all?" (Coyaba, p. 14) The key word is "purpose," for, to the Arawaks, the divine intention is very much at the heart of the matter. Unlike the priestess, the Cacique is angry with the gods; "What manner of gods are they," he asks, "who do nothing when their followers are broken and destroyed and driven from their hunting and fishing and playing grounds? From their homes? Even from their places of burial? What manner of gods?" (Coyaba, pp. 14-15) In its depiction of a human catastrophe in a society where gods are believed to be the appointers of destiny, Coyaba recalls Achebe's Arrow of God where, in magnificent proverbial prose, another chief priest, Ezeulu, questions the morality of his god Ulu:

> But why, he asked himself again and again, why had Ulu chosen to deal thus with him, to strike him down and then cover him with mud? What was his offence? Had he not divined the god's will and obeyed it? When was it ever heard that a child was scalded by the piece of yam its own mother put in its palm? What man would send his son with a potsherd to bring fire from a neighbour's hut and then unleash rain on him? Who ever sent his son up the palm to gather nuts and then took an axe and felled the tree?[3]

The immediate reason for Ezeulu's grief is the untimely death of his favorite son, Obika, which "shook Umuaro to the roots" and left Ezeulu "as though he had died."[4] Discernible in Ezeulu's lament, however, is the fact that the priest blames his god for much more than Obika's death. Just as, in Coyaba, the Cacique is angry with a god who permits the

Spaniards to kill nearly all the Arawaks, so, in Arrow of God, Ezeulu takes issue with his god for allowing the people of Umuaro to fall victim to a historical process which is governed by neither justice nor fairness. In the growing power of the British administration and in the ignominy he suffers from it, in his increasing isolation from his own people and in the sacrilegious behaviour of his own son, Oduche, Ezeulu sees the hand of a treacherous god.

Like Ezeulu, the Cacique suffers intense personal humiliation; rendered powerless by the events of history and unaided by his god, he ceases to represent the formidable fusion, in his society, of god and man. If Ezeulu degenerates into a conspicuously impotent arrow in the bow of his god, the Cacique becomes paralysed with fear at the thought of descending his hill and facing a community which awaits guidance from him. As he explains to the high priestess, "...if they say to me, 'Cacique,...do you believe the intruders will go away?' Am I to tell them I do not know? And if they press and say: 'But what do you believe, wise one?' Am I to answer them again and say I do not know?" (Coyaba, p. 20) Realising that the Cacique is no longer either their god's mouthpiece or an agent of divine help, the priestess turns their conversation to a consideration of any practical survival lessons that might be learned from the history of their race. She cites the example of their ancestors who, like the Boers in nineteenth century South Africa, saw wisdom in fleeing from their stronger adversaries. "They did not sit down and wait to die," she reminds the Cacique, "They built canoes and made the long journey from the great land to this place" (Coyaba, p. 15). With this prodding of history for solutions, the Cacique is clearly impatient, and his impatience is not causeless. In his realistic and commonsensical vein, he recognises that events have bypassed their history and rendered it irrelevant to the needs of their present. To him, their ancestors are nothing but "a burden on a man's spirit." They were people of a different era who "taught gentleness and peaceful ways" without worrying about trying to fashion the "death-sticks" which give the Spaniards such unsurpassable strength. He doubts the feasibility of constructing canoes for their escape because they are not near the sea and because felling trees and digging them out and shaping them with fire and stone "is a labour that will need time and many men and women from many villages" (Coyaba, p. 16).

The Cacique and the high priestess are saddened by the likelihood that, after their extermination as a people, no true history of their race will exist. They understand that history is fundamentally important, that "It linked the ancestors with their ancestors far back into the great land, and with us all their descendants into the small lands" (Coyaba, p. 19). They also understand that history is decided on the battlefield by the winners. As the Cacique laments,"They [the Spaniards] would remember us not as we are but as they have made us" (Coyaba, p. 18). To the last of the Arawaks, this prospect is much more frightening than their present suffering, for, as the Cacique philosophises, "Remembrance is the thread of life. Without it there is no meaning" (Coyaba, p. 19).

The minds of the two Arawaks do not wander from their gods for long. To the high priestess comes the thought, with the flashing suddenness of a revelation, that the Arawak gods may neither be omnipotent nor immortal. Both she and the Cacique sense that they are witnessing an extraordinary moment in the history of their race. As usual, it is the Cacique who articulates their feelings:

> There was never a time like this in the remembrance of our people. And when the wise ones do not know what to tell the young or where to lead them, when there is no more belief in gods and no vision of hope to take us forward, when we ask if our gods are dead, then we are into the time of desolation. This is that time, my love. (Coyaba, p. 23)

Obviously, divinity is very much at the fore of Arawak thinking; it is almost as if, from their point of view, the Spaniards in themselves do not matter, having been washed onto the Jamaican shore by the inexorable flow of history. Peter Abrahams is never completely free of this point of view according to which a sort of providential law governs the affairs of this world.

Having dealt with the story of the Arawaks, Abrahams telescopes nearly three centuries of time to dramatise another important stage in history, the period from the slave rebellions in Jamaica in the 1820s to the aftermath of the abolition of slavery in Jamaica in 1838. The setting, then, is British-ruled Jamaica, a world where, unlike that of the Arawaks, the victims of oppression depend less on providence than on their own radical action to shape their collective destiny. His nagging sense of the inevitability of historic human events notwithstanding, Abrahams is full of genuine respect for those who, by their own conscious decision, break free from their bondage. He sees the rebellious slaves' journey through the bush as a feat of biblical heroism. He names a number of the runaway slaves--Sarah, Samson, David, Jonas, Joseph--after unforgettable Old Testament figures. Indeed, the Bible is, in the hands of Sarah, a most noticeable and significant presence among the slaves: from it, Sarah has acquired what little she has of formal education and, with it, she will instruct the next generation of slaves. It is also from the Bible that Sarah picks ~~a name--~~Mount Zion--for their new-found land. Side by side with Abrahams's admiration of the heroic rebellion of the slaves, however, is his suggestion that the slaves' flight is, in itself, proof of the repetition of history. Sarah compares the slaves' new home to "the place to which Moses led the children of Israel out of slavery," and Samson is, in his leadership role and physical might, a reincarnation of the biblical Moses and the biblical Samson combined (Coyaba, p. 43). The novelist implies that this early nineteenth century slave rebellion in Jamaica is, in a sense, the history of the Israelites' flight from Pharoah repeating itself.

An important aspect of Abrahams's thought is his understanding that, when people of one race successfully rebel against their oppressors of a different race, they do not automatically win for themselves personal freedom. In one's own racial group, as in subjugation by a different racial group, the struggle for individual freedom seems an endless task. No sooner are the fleeing slaves free from their white masters than they become prisoners of their own communal charter. Sarah and David, two of the youngest slaves, fall in love with each other and find themselves unable to accept the provision in their group's charter which forbids sexual intercourse between consenting adults until the group leader, Samson, has exercised his exclusive right of sleeping with all the women during the slaves' first year together. The logic behind this strange rule, supposedly (and most doubtfully) African in origin, is supplied by its proponent, Maria, the eldest of the female slaves, a veritable femme fatale: "The leader must have more children; and if all the women have children for the leader the women and the children look to the leader and give him strength..." (Coyaba, p. 48). First, Sarah and David oppose their community's law on sex by having sex with each other before Samson has had a chance to enjoy his exclusive privilege. Then, they express their dissent verbally: Sarah declares that she "will not breed with anyone but David," and neither she nor David is willing to hand over to Samson any children that might be born to them (Coyaba, pp. 56-57). Nothing remains but for Samson to give in to Maria's demand that David and

Sarah be expelled from the group. Samson announces, "They will not live by what we agreed so we must cast them out. Let them go now!" (Coyaba, p. 57) In the continuing story of the runaway slaves, Abrahams makes his disapproval of this disregard for individual freedom evident. David and Sarah become wealthy and famous missionaries in the village of Cyprus, whereas Samson and his Mount Zion community suffer a corresponding decline in prosperity. When Samson becomes paralysed, it is Sarah and David who come to his rescue. As David and his wife rise in the reader's esteem, Maria sinks to the level of her former slave masters whose Machiavellian logic she now uses in her dealings with the crippled Samson. "If you will get well," she tells Samson, "we will wait and we will look after you....If you are not going to get well you are a burden we cannot bear" (Coyaba, p. 133). The group has lost all compassion for the helpless individual. It is through the character of Noname that Abrahams's disapprobation of Mount Zion's expulsion of Sarah and David is most forcefully expressed. "...Maria shouldn't a done that," Noname reflects ungrammatically many years after the incident, "and we shouldn't a agree for them to go. Now it is them caring Samson..." (Coyaba, p. 146).

The Great Trek of the South African Boers is the other early nineteenth century historical event which Abrahams subjects to fictional analysis. In Wild Conquest (1950), Abrahams's controversial book on the Great Trek, we discern the distinction between two notions of freedom: one legitimate, the other contrived. True freedom is that which, in the opening pages of Wild Conquest, is within the grasp of the slaves who work for the Boer Jansen family; it is that which the British make into law on "the first of December in the year of our Lord eighteen-hundred and thirty-four...."[7] To the slaves, South Africa has for long been a place where freedom has become an unfamiliar feeling, where freedom has been a thing of the past, of the time before the establishment of the first Dutch East India Company station. This is why the rumour about their freedom causes much excitement among the slaves of the Jansen household and makes of the atmosphere of the novel's second chapter something similar to the atmosphere of the early part of Orwell's Animal Farm. Like the anthropomorphic animals of Manor Farm, when the slaves of the Jansen farm sense that they will soon be rid of their masters, they become uncharacteristically euphoric. Consequently, the Jansens, like the Joneses in Orwell's satire, become insecure, nervous and watchful. Unlike Orwell's animals, however, Abrahams's slaves decide not to stage a coup d'etat, choosing instead to wait for the freedom that is surely coming their way. While they wait, the Jansen slaves realise that they have been shackled for so long that they must now struggle to understand the meaning of freedom. To Old Johannes, the leader of the slaves, freedom is a memory. In an argument with his son Paul, who is all for violent rebellion, Johannes explains: "All the years that I have been a slave I have remembered what the wind and rain feel like to a free man. While I stood in the market place in Cape Town and they made offers for me, I remembered; while I laboured on the farm of some Boer, I remembered; I have remembered every day of every year" (Wild Conquest, p. 20). Jan, the legendary slave rebel, evades the issue altogether when Johannes asks him, "...what is freedom? What do you mean when you say freedom?..." (Wild Conquest, p. 23). The wise Johannes himself has no ready answer when a little slave girl asks him, "What is freedom, papa Johannes?" (Wild Conquest, p. 23) His difficulty is seen in the following passage: "The old man smiled and fingered his chin. This was the question he had asked Jan. What is freedom? He sensed that all the others were as anxious to know the meaning of freedom as the child who had asked. What is freedom? He tried to think about it. He knew it was something he felt, something deep inside him..." (Wild Conquest, p. 24). Johannes's problem is that he is trying to define a word whose meaning is as elusive as the meanings of words like "wisdom" or "democracy" or "virtue" or "progress," all of which are terms that cannot easily be explained through palpable examples. After much thinking, however, the old man seizes on the possessions of the Jansens as the concrete illustration through which he explains that freedom means one's ability to own the fruit of one's labour. He tells his people:

> Look at the house and the earth and the trees and the beasts. All that you see belongs to the Jansens....Yet we, all of us, we built the house and tilled the earth and got rid of the weeds and planted the food and looked after the cattle....Would it be so wrong for that to belong to us? We made it.... The child says "what is freedom, papa?" I say: when that valley belongs to us, and when the things we build and the food we grow is [sic] ours, ... and when there is no Baas Koos and Baas Kasper to take what is ours, I say that is freedom.... (Wild Conquest, p. 25)

In his explanation of "freedom," Johannes does no more than express the truths which Thomas Jefferson held to be self-evident, namely, the equality of all men and their inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The old slave's explanation may be too simple and narrow, but it offers a picture of true freedom.

False freedom is that which the Boers maintain is their divine right to make slaves of black people, or rather to impress on black people that the good God intended them to be the natural inferiors of white people. This is what Kasper Jansen tries to do when he bears down on old Johannes with a fixed inquisitorial look. "Let him [Johannes] lower his eyes," Kasper urges himself on, "Force him to do so and after that he would say 'Baas Kasper' as he had done for years" (Wild Conquest, p. 40). Like many Voortrekkers, Kasper considers himself one of God's chosen people who are no different from the Jews who, in Exodus, wandered from Egypt to Canaan. To him, Johannes is a child of Ham, a slave with a slave's mind whose freedom, decreed by British law, is incomprehensible. "Just a little while ago," Kasper remembers, "he had thought of giving Young Johannes to his [Kasper's] son as a personal slave. Now the English law said they were equals and had the same rights. What was the meaning of all this?" (Wild Conquest, p. 32) Given this tremendous desire of the Boers to own slaves, it is bitterly ironic for them to present their Great Trek as a break from bondage (Wild Conquest, p. 36). It is to this irony that Old Johannes refers when he says, "Often have I heard Kasper Jansen and his friends talk about freedom. But for them it [freedom] is something else" (Wild Conquest, p. 25). The novelist's first point is that a people who can say "For us there will never be any equality [with Kaffirs]" cannot safely be said to have a genuine interest in safeguarding human freedom (Wild Conquest, p. 36). His second point is that the Boers have, by their steadfast opposition to the freedom of others, shown themselves to be as barbaric as will later be "Hitler and many others before him" who will make "of tyranny a creed to live by."[9] His third point is that "the whole story of White settlement in South Africa has conspired to make" his "White fellow-country-men enemies of change and, therefore, enemies of history" (Goli, pp. 170-171).

Then, why in the name of God does Peter Abrahams, in Chapter v of Return to Goli, write the following passage:

> ...the story of the Afrikaans-speaking Whites began as one of the most heroic quests for freedom of modern times. These people so loved freedom that their journey in search of it--the Great Trek--is the outstanding epic of heroic enterprise and high endeavour in modern South African history.... Whatever else might be said of that epic journey, it was an undoubted testimony to a people's love of freedom. (Goli, p. 171)

It seems that Abrahams has, here, taken hold of the wrong end of the stick. As Kenneth Parker observes irrefutably, "There is no logically justifiable way in which a people who flee in order to continue their desire to enslave others because of colour can be said to be in quest of freedom."[9] One must also dispute the novelist's claim that the Boers' trek was "one of the most heroic quests... of modern times." Although the trekkers had their share of brave, adventurous exploits, the Great Trek was a small undertaking compared with, for example, the American emigration to the west that was contemporary with it. Whereas the Voortrekkers are said to have been about 14,000 people in all, the American emigrants numbered in the hundred thousands if not in the millions. In moving from the northern parts of Cape Colony to the northern Transvaal, the Boers covered the ordinary distance of 600 miles; by contrast, the emigrants of America travelled about 3,500 miles from Illinois and Missouri to Oregon and California. The Voortrekkers also had easier opposition in their battles, for South Africa's natives had far fewer firearms than the American Indians.[10] Even by "African rather than by world yardsticks," observes Parker, the Great Trek was "a relatively modest affair compared to (say) the Mfecane."[11] Having presented these objections, however, one must contest Kenneth Parker's claim that Abrahams intended his praise of the Boers' trek to be a statement of "what he tried to do in Wild Conquest."[12] Nowhere does Abrahams so much as imply that he meant Wild Conquest to be a glorification of the Great Trek. In the absence of Abrahams's own statement of purpose, it is nothing but "intentional fallacy" for Parker to infer Abrahams's purpose from something the novelist has said in a different context. If it is wise to trust not the teller but the tale, it is even wiser to trust the tale on an issue about which the teller is silent.

Far from offering the Boers any sense of freedom, the Great Trek, as dramatised in Wild Conquest, extinguishes whatever humanist values the trekkers started out with. These people who have left Cape Colony because they are against freedom for blacks find, with the progress of their journey, that they are fast losing their own freedom and their ability to be tender and compassionate to one another. Koos Jansen, more debased than ever, rapes the dreamy Boer lass, Elsie Bezuidenhout (Wild Conquest, pp. 109-112). A father, old Martinus Van As, advises his son Paul to be as callous as possible: "If you are not hard, you are killed, you are lost....In order to win, to live, you have to be hard, without pity, without mercy..." (Wild Conquest, p. 124). But the most tragic victim of this process of the dehumanisation of the Boers is Anna Jansen who, together with Paul Van As, represents the conscience and fellow-feeling left within the ranks of the trekkers. Unable to function in an environment increasingly devoid of affection and tenderness, Anna becomes a foil to her husband Kasper, a true Boer who has easily reconciled himself to the dictates of the trek. That overwhelming hatred for the blacks, by which Kasper is consumed at the beginning of the trek is now, like a stray bullet, outside the range of the control of its source; it is harmful to all, even to a loved one like Anna, who stand in its path. As with Hendrik Van der Merwe in Song of the City, Kasper's herd instinct, which compels him to win a place in the larger Boer community, proves detrimental to his marriage. Communication between Kasper and his wife diminishes steadily until Anna makes a valiant attempt to break the silence. She appeals to her husband: "We are like strangers. We don't speak to each other any more. You turn your eyes away from me, and I tell you I'm having a child and you are not even happy." To which her husband replies, "Anna, we're on trek" (Wild Conquest, p. 133). Anna's misery is so complete that it transforms her physical form and appearance. It is indeed a sorrowful moment when, in one of the most graphic scenes in the novel, she stares at her reflection in a river and whispers pathetically: "I have no breasts,.....I am dry. Like a piece of meat that's been cut up and dried for the trek. Everything is for the trek" (Wild Conquest, p. 151).

Although one may refuse to accept Abrahams's exaggerated praise of the Great Trek, one can understand the reasons for which the novelist admires some aspects of the Afrikaner personality. The main thing in the Afrikaans-speaking whites which commands Abrahams's respect is their considerable Africanisation. Unlike the English, the Afrikaners have severed all but their scientific and technological links with Europe and have, like the traditional blacks, become true "Natives of the earth." As no English poetry written in South Africa does, Afrikaner poetry is full of reverence for the African earth. Afrikaner customs and songs, says Abrahams, are of the veld and might therefore contribute much good to the unified culture of the future South Africa. Abrahams also admires the language of the Afrikaners, against which there will later, in 1976, be a memorable black uprising. He considers Afrikaans a happy creation because it is a language which the Afrikaners were able to fashion "Out of their need, and out of Africa," and while it is "related to the old Dutch of Europe," it is new and belongs to the Afrikaners and to Africa (Goli, p. 179). Diligent student of history that Abrahams is, it is highly probable that his admiration of some aspects of the Afrikaner personality also stems from his familiarity with "the positive factor" in the history of Afrikaner dissidence--important historical information which the novelist's critics do not present. To explain this "positive factor," one may borrow from Andre Brink three portraits from the gallery of Afrikaner dissidents. There is the factual story of the Boer rebel, Coenraad de Buys who, in the early years of the nineteenth century, lived with his black wife across the border of Cape Colony; de Buys did not hesitate to break any colonial law which was meant to curb his human liberty. There was also, in the early years of the nineteenth century, Frederik Bezuidenhout, another Boer who was said to be living with a dark-skinned wife. Bezuidenhout's defiance of British authority was so total that soldiers were dispatched to drag him to court; he was later shot dead by the British. Even Louis Trichardt, the famous pioneer trekker, is said to have been "a rather off-beat individual who allegedly smuggled guns to the Xhosas for years before he loaded his wagon, " and to have been one whose "closest neighbours and friends were, in fact, black."[13] Clearly, an appreciation of the "positive factor" in the history of the Afrikaners makes it impossible to regard this history as one long night of evil. Abrahams has keenly studied the Afrikaner people in their march towards nationhood and, although he has found much that is detestable in their mentality, he has also discovered some redeeming peculiarities. The point that must be emphasised is that Abrahams does not work his appreciation of the positive side of Afrikaner history into the fiction of Wild Conquest; at the Boers he directs far more epithets of abhorrence than of praise. It is true that Anne Jansen and Paul Van As are two characters through whom the novelist preaches that not all the Voortrekkers are hard and heartless; however, Anne and Paul constitute too token a representation of virtue in a novel which relentlessly reveals that side of the Boer personality which is characterised, in Brink's words, "by fear, by suspicion, by uncertainty, hence by arrogance, meanness, narrowmindedness, pigheadedness."[14]

The author of Wild Conquest does not confine his search for a historical understanding of mid-nineteenth century South Africa to the farm and the ox-wagon environments of the Boers; he dissects the black South African society of the time and, with typical honesty, reveals that here, as among the Boers, humanism and liberty did not flourish. There are a few references to the Zulu King Chaka who had by the time of the Great Trek already exterminated many black tribes, and to another Zulu King, Dingaan, who murdered Chaka. However, the black society of Abrahams's interest is that of the Matabele, a Zulu people who were once part of Chaka's kingdom. With the death of Chaka, the Matabele, under King Mzilikazi, become all-powerful in Southern Africa. Their army of black Spartans evokes awe in all the King's enemies with whom it deals swiftly and ruthlessly when the need arises. When the people of the Barolong city of Kunana kill two Matabele emissaries, Mzilikazi, who is tired of bloodletting, nevertheless wreaks death and destruction on Kunana. Indeed, such is the pervasiveness of death in the Matabele world that a married woman's refusal to obey the lewd wishes of a Matabele prince could be fatal. Ntonbi, wife of the Matabele army captain, Dabula, is forced to the realisation that she is essentially unfree when Prince Langa asks to have her in his hut. She does not comply with the prince's indecent request and, consequently, one of the prince's medicine-men renders her incapable of movement or speech until she is rescued by another medicine-man, the good and wise Nkomozi. That women have no freedom in the world of the Matabele is also made clear by the fact that, in those villages under the protection of Mzilikazi, no maiden dares resist the sexual overtures of a Matabele warrior. When the Matabele army captain, Dabula, and two of his aides-de-camp pay a night visit, during a hunting expedition, to one of these villages, the village chief places at their disposal three young virgins. As for the three unfortunate maidens, they are virtual "non-persons," tabulae rasae on which the men make their impressions. The case of Umindi, the girl with whom Dabula secretly sleeps, is especially pathetic. Like the other two girls, Umindi has, before the arrival of the Matabele, been, reserved as a wife for the chief. Now, if the chief knows that a sexual union has taken place between Umindi and Dabula, he will simply unmarry the girl; if, however, the chief, not knowing this, proceeds to have sex with the maiden only to discover that she has already lost her virginity, then woe unto Umindi! Dabula is aware of all this when, after he has enjoyed sexual gratification, he commands Umindi to seal her lips on the matter of their intercourse. To the girl's pleas ("But the chief--", "But when he sleeps with me and finds...," "He will turn me out, lord. All the people--.")--to all these entreaties, Dabula repeats his callous response: "I don't care! You did not sleep with me! Understand?" (Wild Conquest, p. 202). Add to the plights of these women a bloody witch-hunt which claims forty-one lives in one night, and Abrahams's picture of a Matabele people with little regard for human life and liberty becomes too striking to be missed.

Clearly, Abrahams's interest in the theme of human feedom is present in both the Boer and the Matabele sections of Wild Conquest. One cannot understand, then, why Michael Wade does not see that "the emphasis laid on this issue of freedom and slavery" in Part One of Book One persists "as a theme through the rest of the book."[15] It is easy to agree with Wade that there is a structural disjunction between the opening slavery section and the rest of the novel, but it is hard to agree that Wild Conquest has absolutely no thematic integration. Wade also objects to Abrahams's characterisation of Gubuza, Commander of Mzilikazi's armies, the man of whom Dabula is protege. Gubuza (whose counterpart among the Boers is Paul Van As) is the one man in Matabeleland with that rare combination of distinction, humanism and courage which makes him an effective critic of his people's ways. He expresses strong disapproval of the destruction of Kunana, asking of his people, "Do we know if the people of Kunana had decided to punish their own chief and make amends for the death of our two indunas?" (Wild Conquest, p. 217) When the general opinion turns against him, he stands his ground, daring those who think him cowardly to "step forward and touch spears" with him (Wild Conquest, p. 218). Gubuza finds the witch-hunt which claims forty-one lives in one night sickening, and he tells the King, "I am afraid of the darkness of our people" (Wild Conquest, p. 257). To Wade, this character, this humanist and sage in the society of the Matabele, is a violation of "the canons of literary realism" for, says Wade, "it is unlikely that anyone at Mzilikazi's court was a liberal humanist with empiricist leanings."[16] But how can the critic make such assertions without adducing any evidence to support his implied contention that liberal humanism and political sagacity exist exclusively in western societies? How about a "liberal humanist" like Unoka in Achebe's Things Fall Apart or a political sage "with empiricist leanings" like Ezeulu in Achebe's Arrow of God--are they also unrealistic and unconvincing creations? Like Wade, Ogungbesan finds Abrahams's characters unbelievable because "too much Western consciousness pervades their awareness." He takes issue with Ngugi wa Thiong'o who praises Wild Conquest for showing "that traditional African doctors had a knowledge of psychology in the treatment of psychic disorders and disease."[17] Had Abrahams's Matabele characters been Freud-quoting or Jung-quoting psychologists with some knowledge of Locke or Hume, one would indeed have been shocked; but it is hardly surprising that traditional African doctors (or anybody else for that matter) should have a knowledge of psychology.

In Wild Conquest, Peter Abrahams has, to quote Mphahlele, "introduced 'a new will into past time'" and bent "history to a point in order to tell more of the truth than the historian."[18] These words of Mphahlele do not, as Michael Wade suggests they do, constitute an undermining of Abrahams's achievement as a historical novelist.[19] The words are intended to be approbative, to imply that exuberance of imagination can be a commendable thing in a novelist who utilises the raw material of history. Abrahams, in Wild Conquest, is not content with simply dramatising the Great Trek within a cause-and-effect framework. His concern, as a creative writer, is to shed some light on the sinister forces at work in the mentalities of both the Boer and the Matabele peoples who are the two most thrustful forces who populate the world of mid-nineteenth century South Africa. It does not matter that he has compressed time and omitted the Battle of Blood River; the important thing is that he has, out of his full confrontation with and interpretation of his subject, made several insightful observations about human freedom. He has presented slavery as an unparalleled evil from which the black people of South Africa are destined, either by a process of social evolution or by revolution, to be free. He has suggested what is too dreadful to contemplate, namely, that the Boers' cry for freedom is, in the main, a cry for the power to keep others in bondage. He has also made the central point that neither the Boers nor the Matabele understand the fundamental sacredness of human freedom and life. This is the issue to which Gubuza and Paul van As, both of whom represent goodwill among a tiny minority in their warring racial groups, address themselves even as they die at each other's hands. The Matabele warrior whispers, "So long since I tilled the earth," and his Boer conterpart replies, "I, too, have not tilled the earth for many months." The reader is not, of course, expected to miss the equation between "the earth" on the one hand and agricultural productivity and peacefulness on the other. He is not expected to miss the point that the two men regret having lived their lives as agents of death instead of as agents of life. Paul says, "I was for peace" and Gubuza retorts, "But you killed." Paul explains that "There is hate in my people," and Gubuza concedes, "Now there is hate in my people too" (Wild Conquest, p. 379). Abrahams's message is clear. Both the Boers and the Matabele have fled from rulers under whom they were not free. However, the two groups have themselves proven to be enemies of human life and freedom. Ultimately, the trek of the one group from the Cape is as futile an undertaking as the trek of the other from the kingdom of Chaka. And so, it seems, will be the trek into the near future, into the "new day."

The historical period considered next in Abrahams's fiction is the first three decades of the twentieth century. Abrahams first sketches, in The View from Coyaba, the American South of the first decade of the century, a racist world into which walks Jacob Brown, grand-son of the runaway slaves David and Sarah. Jacob comes to the State of Georgia to study theology at the University of Atlanta and, in no time, begins "the painful process of learning what it meant to be black in America." As a member of a social studies group, Jacob learns that, in the Southern United States, "black men, women and children were set to the torch by mobs of whites for real or fancied crimes like rape or theft or being 'uppity'," that "Rape could be simply the way a black man looked at a white woman; assault could be a black accidentally bumping against a white on a pavement...." Jacob also learns that the blacks of the Southern United States are absolutely defenceless, that they "could be cheated and robbed by whites in business or trade or commerce with no hopes of redress in the courts of law," that "Homes built by blacks which were considered too pretentious would be set on fire and a wooden cross burned as warning to other blacks," that "the law never found the [white] arsonists, even when they boasted about having done the deed," that "When black women were raped neither the law nor the white mobs paid more than lewd attention to the event" (Coyaba, p. 157). Clearly, the blacks of this society are, like the blacks of past and present South Africa, victims of a comprehensive and legalised racism. At the centre of this sociological investigation of negro life is William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, the first of many twentieth century black historical personages whom we shall come across or hear about in Coyaba. The real-life Du Bois, once described as "the greatest scholar the

Negro race has produced," was a meticulous historian and sociologist.[30] Born in 1868, Du Bois earned a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1895 and, by the end of the nineteenth century, had written two classics. In 1896, he wrote the Suppression of the African Slave Trade which became Volume I in the Harvard Classics and, in 1899, he completed The Philadelphia Negro for the writing of which, according to Martin Luther King, Jr., "Dr. Du Bois personally visited and interviewed 5,000 people."[31] Du Bois went on to write many more monumental books on the American negro, African history, and on the falsification of black history by some white scholars. When the ninety-five year old Du Bois died in 1963, he was at work on an Encyclopedia Africana in the newly independent West African nation of Ghana. He "...was ignored by a pathetically ignorant America," said Martin Luther King, Jr., in his centennial address on Du Bois, "but not by history."[32] The presence of Du Bois in the fiction of Coyaba is happy proof that this rare man has not been ignored by history.

The Du Bois Abrahams presents is not the post-World War I political organiser and activist, but the pre-1910 academic; not the man who helped to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) and was in the thick of pan-African conferences and later became a communist, but the professor who is always "examining, sifting, questioning, collating and...writing" (Coyaba, p. 157). As the conductor of Jacob Brown's social studies group at the University of Atlanta, Du Bois implants in his students a "questing intellectual vigour" which causes problems for Jacob Brown in the latter's theology classes. Like the Arawaks at the beginning of the novel, Du Bois and Jacob debate the power and the disposition of divinity to end cruelty and injustice in this world. Against the shrewdly commonsensical arguments of the professor, Jacob does not fare well as a theodicean. Du Bois wonders about the Christian God: "Is He indifferent? Has He made no choice? Is it all some grand game he is playing with puny little humans for pawns? For surely, a God of love, a God of goodness should tilt the scales in favour of goodness and love...?" Jacob replies unsatisfactorily, "Has He not done so?" and there is a hint of self-doubt in the reply (Coyaba, p. 155). This debate between the historian and the theology student, like the earlier one between the Arawak Cacique and his priestess, represents Abrahams's ambivalent attitude to the issue of divine intervention. We know from Tell Freedom that

Abrahams longs to see in this world "the compassionate humanity that pervaded the life and teaching of Christ";[23] one part of the novelist's mind must therefore agree with Jacob Brown that the Christian divinity is "a God of truth and caring...of respect and grace" (Coyaba, p. 154). However, there is the other part of Abrahams's mind which, informed by history and experience, like the mind of Du Bois, questions beliefs which do not seem to be vindicated. The question Du Bois asks Jacob, "How can your God of love condone so much cruelty...?" is Abrahams's as well (Coyaba, p. 154).

The Alabama family of Harriet Bruce, one of Du Bois's students, daily lives the unfortunate life that Du Bois and his group study and discuss. "My family are sharecroppers," explains Harriet to Jacob, "We live on white people's land and work a piece of it and in exchange they take half of the crop. There's a whole village of us, my family and other families, and we are all dirt-poor" (Coyaba, p. 163). During a visit to Harriet's family, Jacob learns from Harriets's mother what her family and many other blacks have suffered in the American South. He concludes that the Jamaican negro's experience of racism has not been as bad; this is "why he [Jacob] was not and could not be as angry as they [Harriet's family] were: theirs was an anger of despair, and despair was alien to the hill folk where he came from." Harriet's mother, a victim of racial rape, agrees with this view; she observes that, unlike the Jamaican negroes who have their hills to run to, the black Americans have no hiding place (Coyaba, p. 172). Jacob has earlier pointed out that the reason for the comparatively less despondency suffered by Jamaican blacks is that, unlike the black Americans, the Jamaicans have the consolation of numbers. Although the whites burned down his grandparents' church a long time ago, says Jacob, "they will not lynch us or molest our women because they know there will be war" (Coyaba, p. 170). Here, as often, the novelist's characters have become his mouthpieces, for their views have already been expressed in the following passage from Abrahams's essay, "The Meaning of Harlem":

> Only in America does the Negro form a separate minority group with a background of three centuries of domicile and no other home to go to. The African or West Indian has no background of mob terror such as plagued the American Negro, especially between 1882 and 1931, when 3436 Negroes were lynched. To be sure the Negroes of South Africa are now experiencing a harsher form of segregation.... But even they have the comfort of numbers, the comfort of knowing that when the evil day has passed, as it must, the land and the future will be theirs. Only in America is the Negro destined to be a permanent racial minority.[24]

However, as the very next section of the novel shows, the comfort of racial numbers is more psychological than real. The landscape of discrimination is now that of the Liberia of the 1930s where, under the presidency of Edwin Barclay, one privileged group of black people (the Americo-Liberians) subjugates the indigenous African population. At Jacob Brown's mission some miles outside Monrovia, not one of the five black Americans with whom Jacob runs his enterprise can remove the ingrained belief of Nurse Marjorie Symes, an Americo-Liberian, that the Liberian natives are "backward and savage and uncivilized and would remain so for a long time to come." Indeed, the liberal tendencies of the black Americans (the Afro-Americans) cause "grave problems" between that group and the Americo-Liberians. While the Americo-Liberians can tolerate the Afro-Americans' efforts to bring "schooling and the rudiments of good health habits" to the Liberian natives, they regard as "sheer trouble-making" any talk, by the black Americans, of native rights (Coyaba, p. 186). At this time in their history, the Liberian natives are not yet very political-minded, and what hits them hardest is neither the abuse and the contempt they suffer from the Americo-Liberians nor their lack of basic political rights; what hits them hardest is a bread-and-butter matter like government-approved extortion. Here is what they say when they come to Jacob Brown for help:

> We ask of you to intercede on our behalf with the government. Taxes and tributes are traditionally collected once a year. We paid our taxes at the usual time this year, no more than three months ago, and the burden was heavy. But we paid. Now eight days ago, the soldiers have returned and are demanding more taxes and are taking our people's food; they are threatening to destroy our fields and burn our huts if we do not give them more tribute.... (Coyaba, p. 194)

Clearly, the early twentieth century history of black people, as fictionalised in Coyaba, is a nightmare of which racism constitutes the major, not the only, seamy side. It is a sustainedly sad comment on the human condition that Abrahams has made, and there is much in this comment that has been held up for the moral outrage of posterity. Abrahams's approach to black history challenges those who would always delineate this history as a fight between white people and black people. It should make even those with a more balanced view of black history pause a little before embracing the abundant truth in Du Bois's famous declaration that "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line...."[11]

The last phase in Abrahams's historical fiction extends from the period of decolonisation to the era of post-independence dictatorship in Africa. Abrahams ushers this phase in with *A Wreath for Udomo* (1956), the first novel in the English language to treat extensively the subject of political nationalism in West Africa. At one level, *A Wreath for Udomo* is a historical novel because it presents well-rounded fictional portraits of two men with an undeniable place in the liberation history of modern Africa. These personages, the Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah and the Trinidadian George Padmore, were once Abrahams's friends with whom he helped to organise the fifth pan-African congress in Manchester in October 1945.[26] That the character of Michael Udomo is modelled after the character of Kwame Nkrumah cannot be a point of contention; the evidence, in the novel, of this fact is abundant. Nkrumah's most striking physical feature was his eyes. In Abrahams's 1959 essay, "The Blacks," an account of the novelist's visit to Kenya in 1952 and to Ghana in 1953, Abrahams notes: "For me, the most striking change was in his eyes. They reflected an inner tranquillity which was the one thing the Nkrumah in Europe never had."[27] When *A Wreath for Udomo* opens, a woman in a London pub is staring at Udomo (that is, at the Nkrumah in Europe), and this woman's fascination with Udomo's eyes is the point of the very first sentence of the novel: "Lois would not have noticed him if it had not been for his eyes." Lois soon locates the peculiar quality of Udomo's eyes in the fact that they are "haunted and lonely,"[28] a description very similar to the observation by Richard Wright, the black American novelist, that Nkrumah had "a pair of brooding, almost frightened eyes...."[29] Abrahams evidently intends Udomo to be recognisable as a portrait of Nkrumah. Why else does he make Udomo's travels, education, political fortunes and political tribulations so undisguisedly similar to those of the late Ghanaian leader? Like Nkrumah's, Udomo's stay in London is an interlude between his years of education somewhere in the western world and his return to active politics in his native country. It is true that before Udomo comes to London, he studies in Europe and Canada and, not as Nkrumah did, in the United States; but this is so obviously because Abrahams does not want his hero to be like Nkrumah *in toto*. Nkrumah went to England in 1945 and left in 1947, and Udomo arrives in London in the immediate aftermath of World War II; during Nkrumah's stay in London, he immersed himself in the politics of national independence, and so does

Udomo; one of the important things Nkrumah did during the first year of his return to the Gold Coast was to found and edit a newspaper, the *Accra Evening News*, which dished out a steady supply of slogans and freedom politics to his countrymen; shortly after his return to Panafrica, Udomo founds and edits a newspaper, the *Queenstown Post*, the aim of which is to rouse the people of Panafrica to political action; if the word "Accra" in the title of Nkrumah's newspaper was the capital of the Gold Coast, the word "Queenstown" in the title of Udomo's paper is the capital of Panafrica; like the *Accra Evening News* which subsequently suffered financial problems because it antagonised Nkrumah's Ghanaian and British political opponents, Udomo's *Queenstown Post* soon runs into financial difficulties because it incurs the hostility of the colonial authorities and Udomo's Panafrican political enemies.

There are more important parallels between Udomo and Nkrumah. Amilcar Cabral, the late Guinea-Bissau leader, once described Nkrumah as "the strategist of genius in the struggle against classical colonialism."[30] There was, perhaps, no better evidence of Nkrumah's skill in strategy than his successful launching of "Positive Action" in the Gold Coast in 1950. "Positive Action" was, in Nkrumah's words, "as a last resort, the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts, and non-co-operation based on the principles of absolute non-violence."[31] When "Positive Action" began in earnest in the Gold Coast between January 8 and January 11, 1950, says Nkrumah in his autobiography, "All the stores were closed, the trains were stationary, all Government services had closed down and the workers were sitting at home. The whole economic life of the country was at a standstill."[32] Abrahams's hero is, like Nkrumah, a tactician in Gandhi's *Satyargraha* tradition. He calls a strike, and his people heed the call. No Panafrican goes to work, and "The town [Queenstown], on the surface, lay quiet under the burning sun. All the ships lay idle in the harbour. The normally busy port was silent. Even the noonday sun seemed fixed overhead, as though it, too, was on strike" (*Udomo*, p. 191). There is good reason to believe that Nkrumah, in his "Positive Action" campaign, deliberately courted imprisonment. In his autobiography, he says: "I was quite resigned to my fate. I had foreseen what in all probability lay in store for me and I had prepared myself to accept the consequences. It was all a part of the struggle that I had embarked upon."[33] Udomo is similarly anxious for the British authorities to make a hero of him. He tells the powerful Selina: "No matter what happens, you are not to pay any fine. I must stay in jail and serve my time. Your duty will be to keep up the anger of the people and to build up a party that would lead them to freedom. Don't you see, Selina? In jail I'll be the rallying-point for our people" (Udomo, p. 171). Later, in prison, Udomo instructs his defence counsel on the political significance of his imprisonment: "Don't you understand what's happened, man? The case [Udomo's defence] isn't anything now.... Go to the people and tell them I wept. Say: 'Udomo stood at his prison window and held the bars and looked out.... And then Udomo wept'" (Udomo, pp. 203-204). The last sentence cannot but be reminiscent of the Bible's shortest verse, "Jesus wept,"[34] and it suggests that Udomo, like Nkrumah in his glorious days, has an immodest sense of his own importance. Also worthy of mention is the fact that, like the man of whom he is a fictional portrait, Udomo wins an election while he is in prison and leaves prison to form a government straightaway. Abrahams does not, however, dramatise the fact that, after the imprisoned Nkrumah won the 1951 elections, the Gold Coast would still not be granted independence until two more elections later, those of 1954 and 1956; the only indication in the novel that Udomo's election victory does not yet mean political independence for Panafrica is the vestigial presence of colonial authority in the country. When Nkrumah came out of prison, the Gold Coast constitution at the time (the Coussey Constitution) was so unprepared for African self-government that it contained no provision for the post of Prime Minister. The victorious Nkrumah therefore became Leader of Government Business, a high-sounding office without much real power especially when it came to the vital areas of internal security, foreign policy, and national defence; about a year later in March 1952, the co-operative Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, helped effect a constitutional change which enabled Nkrumah to become nominal Prime Minister. In similar circumstances to those in which Nkrumah found himself on leaving prison, Udomo seems to have incomparably more power; and one cannot help the impression that Abrahams has considerably blurred, for fictional purposes, the difference between Nkrumah as nominal Prime Minister and the very powerful megalomaniac who emerged when the Gold Coast attained full political independence.

The other historical personage to whom Abrahams pays homage in Udomo is the West Indian George Padmore who, with the black American Richard Wright, shares the fictional character of Tom Lanwood. Padmore, the grand theoretician of pan-Africanism, was perhaps the most learned and journalistic of the London-based black intellectuals of the post-World War II era. Here is Michael Udomo who, at the thought of meeting Lanwood, is in a state of uncontrollable anxiety: "God, Lanwood! He'd see him tonight. Lanwood! The greatest political writer and fighter Panafrica had produced" (Udomo, p. 7). Stripped of their dramatic mould, these words of Udomo are similar to the following words by Nkrumah about Padmore: "The only person I knew of in England was George Padmore, a West Indian journalist who lived in London and was the author of several articles which had aroused my interest and sympathy. I was so impressed by his writings that I wrote a letter to him from the States...."[35] Like George Padmore who came to independent Ghana as Nkrumah's political adviser, Tom Lanwood ends a thirty-year stay in London and goes to Panafrica to help in the work of Udomo's revolution. Once Lanwood is in Panafrica, however, his relationship with Udomo takes a turn for the worse. Panafrica, a world which is complex, subtle and indirect in its politics, has no appreciation for Lanwood's frank political diatribes, and Udomo who is in tune with this world drifts away from Lanwood who is not. At first, it is a matter of Lanwood saying to Paul Mabi, "I'm not needed here, Paul. I've enough sense left to see that," and of Udomo complaining to Mabi, "He [Lanwood] was distressed when they bathed my feet in blood.... Couldn't understand it..." (Udomo, pp. 274 and 277). Then, things come to a head when Udomo, in an agitated state, pushes Lanwood who half-falls into a settee and who, upon rising, speaks these pathos-laden words: "Mike, you don't have to be rude to me, you know. All you have to do is tell me to go. I won't stay where I'm not wanted. I'm a man, not a dog" (Udomo, pp. 292-293). That same day, Lanwood leaves Panafrica for London where he soon dies. "Truth is," he thinks aloud on his way to make his travel arrangements, "I'm homesick for London. Hadn't realized how used I'd grown to London till now" (Udomo, p. 294). The words recall those of Abrahams who, airborne on his "return to Goli" in 1952, realised "how deeply I had come to love England in the years I had spent there. Really it was home, not the place I was bound for" (Goli, p. 13). Unlike Tom Lanwood, George Padmore died in Ghana and was buried there. Was his relationship with President Nkrumah cordial till the end? It would be interesting to know.

In one scene in the novel--the scene immediately following the one in which Lanwood is ill-treated by Udomo--Lanwood is not Padmore, but Richard Wright. When, during an aimless walk in Queenstown, Lanwood suffers from the unbearable "Heat waves," passes "men piddling in the open gutter," becomes "aware of the strong foul stench of piddle," and laments that "For all his dark skin, the barrier between him and this world was too great" (Udomo, pp. 293-294), he is being made to re-live in fiction what Wright had experienced in the real-life Gold Coast. Abrahams's 1959 essay, "The Blacks," tells of Wright's disgust at the "open drains into which young boys and old men piddled," of Wright's conclusion that "Africans piddled rather more than other people," and of Wright's feeling of alienation; Wright had said to Abrahams, "I was black and they were black but it did not help me."[36]

Were Udomo merely a fictionalisation of aspects of the lives of Nkrumah and Padmore, fit subjects of historical drama as these men are, the novel would not deserve its good reputation. Abrahams understands, to borrow words from an immortal in Ali Mazrui's The Trial of Christopher Okigbo, that "the passing prominence of a particular historical figure" should not be mistaken "for the real causes behind a particular historical event." Writing in the euphoric period of African nationalism during the mid-fifties, Abrahams could not have so ably prophesied the downfall of Nkrumah if he had not instinctively known, in the words of Mazrui's immortal, that "Sometimes kings, princes, presidents, and generals are more incidental as causes behind great events than journalists and historians...have often assumed."[37] A Wreath for Udomo is a good historical novel primarily because it dramatises Udomo's spectacular presence in a brief historical moment without failing to grapple with an ageless truth, hardly expressible, about politics and human conscience and life and death. The novel is about the ever-present conflict, in human affairs, between political necessity and human decency. In one of its climaxes, Udomo, in true realpolitik fashion, betrays a close friend to the racist government of Pluralia (South Africa) in return for technical assistance. Mhendi has spent his life fighting to liberate his country, Pluralia, from the yoke of apartheid, and his betrayal by Udomo is disgusting and unpardonable. However, one searches in vain for the basis of the following observation by Lewis Nkosi: "Abrahams' endorsement of

Udomo's betrayal of Mhendi and his cautious approval of Udomo's alliance with an unnamed racist white state...are some of the most curious aspects of this work."[38] Abrahams's attitude to Udomo's betrayal of Mhendi must be discerned, in part, from the reaction of Paul Mabi, the sensitive artist through whom the novelist voices most of his sentiments. The moment Udomo confesses his deed to Mabi, the latter flings a glass at Udomo's head and resigns from Udomo's cabinet the next morning. To all Udomo's pleas of political necessity, Mabi replies, "I can only see the selling of a friend" (*Udomo*, p. 339). Mabi's letter to Lois at the end of the novel, written six years after Udomo's death, is mainly an apologia for Udomo, but it must be considered vis-a-vis Mabi's earlier reaction to Udomo's act of betrayal. Besides, the apologia is hardly an all-out vindication of Udomo; in it, Mabi admits, in spite of himself, that "Yes, there was something terrible about him [Udomo]." On one hand, Mabi cannot think retrospectively of Udomo "without respect and admiration"; on the other hand, he cannot help wondering, "Can a man betray love and friendship and still be good?" On one hand Mabi knows "the wrong he [Udomo] did [Lois] and Mhendi"; on the other hand, he also knows "the good he [Udomo] did Africa" (*Udomo*, p. 356). What one gathers from all this is that Mabi (and Abrahams, presumably) admires Udomo for winning independence for Panafrica, but cannot really forgive him for betraying Mhendi. The problem for Mabi is whether he can be fair to Udomo without being unfair to Lois and Mhendi, Udomo's victims. He has no easy answers; this is why he wonders confusedly about Udomo, "Was he a good man? A great man? And is greatness beyond good and evil?" (*Udomo*, p. 356)

Through the character of Paul Mabi, then, Abrahams expresses no approval for Udomo's treachery, nor does he indicate any sympathy for "Udomo's alliance with an unnamed racist white state...." Instead, Abrahams has, through the character of Mabi, come close to achieving the romantic state of mind which Keats called "negative capability"--the state of mind "in which a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts." Abrahams is not completely successful at realising "negative capability" because, unlike Keats in his finest poetry (the last odes, for instance), he is not entirely free of an "irritable reaching after fact and reason." It is obvious that Abrahams intends a logical connexion between Udomo's betrayal of Lois and his betrayal of Mhendi; he sees a basic link between treachery in private life and treachery in public life. Must the reader really be surprised that the Udomo who betrays his lover because of concupiscence should deem it necessary to betray his fellow freedom-fighter because of political convenience? If the sexual urge makes a man betray his lover, will not the urge for political glory make him betray his friend? In Abrahams's fundamentally humanist morality, the end does not justify the means, and Udomo therefore stands condemned, for it does not matter that Udomo has all the world if he has not decency in his relations with his fellow human beings. People like Udomo do not live on what Abrahams calls "the last level of living." In Return to Goli, Abrahams explains the infinite goodness of "the last level of living" as "the level of the whole man, freed, ultimately, from his fear. It makes such beautiful sense of E.M. Forster's hope that he would have the guts to choose his friend should the choice arise between friend and country" (Goli, p. 26). It must be Abrahams's regret that Udomo, when faced with the choice between friend and country, chooses country.

Of all the criticism levelled against Udomo, the most sardonic is of Abrahams's attitude, in the novel, to African tribalism. The ritualistic slaying of Udomo in the closing pages of the novel has been singled out by many an offended "Africanist" critic for especially scornful scrutiny. To Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, one of the passages in the scene of Udomo's death "could be mistaken for an extract from one of Rider Haggard's novels." The critic accuses Abrahams of making "a conscious attempt to create an exotic setting to suit the taste of his [Western] audience" and "of trying to create a 'primitive' society which is in desperate need of 'modernization.'"[39] Kolawole Ogungbesan, another "defender" of Africa on the literary front, considers the death-scene of Udomo, "which competes with the most melodramatic scene of witch-hunting in Wild Conquest," as evidence that "Abrahams had material left over from the earlier novel [Wild Conquest] which he felt reluctant to throw away."[40] The annoying problem with these disparagements is that they contain no essential literary argument, for Gakwandi and Ogungbesan are engaged not in literary criticism, but in political crimination. The central point about Udomo's death-scene is not, and ought not to be, its political palatability; indeed, the scene is so obviously devoid of realism (as far as the assassination of a modern African political leader is concerned) that the only reasonable challenge it offers the critic is the discovery of its raison d'etre, the comprehension of its creator's intention. There is a sense in which, in *A Wreath for Udomo*, Abrahams and his hero have variants of the same program: if Udomo is determined to rid his country of what he considers its three main enemies, namely "the white man," "poverty," and "the past," Abrahams is taken up with dramatising these same "three enemies." It is of the last of these "three enemies," the lingering tribal past of Panafrica, that Udomo's death-scene is a satiric projection. In that scene, Abrahams paints the destructive aspects of tribalism in the darkest colours imaginable. It should never be forgotten, however, that at the heart of the matter in this depiction of Udomo's death lies neither realism nor a desire to insult Africa, but a novelist's legitimate satiric intention.

Abrahams is not an enemy of African tribal traditions, but he is not blind to the destructive manifestations of these traditions. What is more important, he is not, like many Janus-faced African intellectuals, afraid of washing in public some of the dirtiest linen of his people. He dislikes the fact that some African tribal societies resort to witch-hunting, to "smelling out" culprits, to solve their drought and famine problems. Great champion of individual freedom that he is, he cannot help wishing that tribal societies were less exclusive than they are. "The lines are drawn very clearly, very sharply," he asserts in "The Blacks," "Anybody not an 'insider' is an enemy, actually or potentially--someone to distrust, someone to fear, someone to keep at bay...."[41] To Abrahams, tribal society has virtually no room for the exercise of individual freedom; as Paul Mabi says in *Udomo*, "The real evil of tribalism in this day and age was that its ritualistic code of fear and authority had robbed man of his individual manhood. How easily the dictator state could flourish here!" (*Udomo*, p. 270) It is Abrahams's belief that a responsible and honest African writer must spend his life not only in addressing the evils of white people but also in summoning the courage to say to his own people, "And you, my black brother...what of your prejudices, your tribal hatreds, your discrimination among yourselves? Is it any less evil for an Ibo to sneer at a Yoruba than for a white to sneer at a black? Is it not the same prejudice when a Xosa looks down on a Shangaan, when a member of the Matabele despises the lowly Makaranga?"[42] "Africanist" critics like Lewis Nkosi, Kolawole Ogungbesan, and Ulli Beier (who, in spite of being a German, is an African cultural nationalist) find Abrahams's frank views on tribalism embarrassing. However, since Abrahams's observations are not unfounded, his critics can only assail him through dishonest means. Says Nkosi: "Abrahams's tribal chieftains are nothing more than fools, men so unaware of the real meaning of power that a twin-engine aeroplane bringing Udomo in from the capital is enough to impress them to such an extent that they are prepared to relinquish their authority at a stroke."[43] Does Nkosi find it hard to accept that, in the forties and the fifties, African villagers were fascinated by aeroplanes which flew through their skies? Contrary to what the critic thinks, it is not foolishness that makes people behave thus; it is the newness, indeed the stangeness, of what they behold. It is not difficult to imagine that, in the years following the invention of the Wright brothers, rural westerners also watched aeroplanes with childish glee and even some awe. If Nkosi finds it inconceivable that Abrahams's chiefs should have been so impressed by an aeroplane, then, perhaps one should remind him that history has recorded that some fifteenth century coastal African chiefs were so impressed by the whisky and the white complexion of Don Diego d'Azambuja that they gave their gold and land to that Portuguese explorer. There is no scarcity of this kind of dishonest criticism of Abrahams's presentation of tribal society in Udomo, but the following observation by Kolawole Ogungbesan is especially unacceptable: "Much of the description of the people and their customs--indeed of the country--seems to come from travel brochures . For example, the description of Queenstown...."[44] Here is Abrahams's description of Queenstown as Tom Lanwood roams in it: "...The glare of the sun was too much for him. He clipped the blackened shade over his glasses.... He looked about for a taxi. None was in sight.... Heat waves rose from the earth. They made him feel dizzy. He passed two men piddling in the open gutter. He became aware of the strong foul stench of piddle" (Udomo, p. 293). How can anyone call this travel brochure material? Writing under the pseudonym, "Akanji," Ulli Beier considers tribalism nothing other than "the prejudices of the white man," and goes on to make the incredibly untrue assertion that "the opposition parties in all West African territories are led by intellectuals of the same class and hold basically similar beliefs as the representatives of government."[45] An honest analysis of the political histories of Ghana and Nigeria alone should amply demonstrate the falsity of Beier's remarks.

It is simply not true, as the "Africanist" critics would have us believe, that Peter Abrahams has no kind words for Africa's traditions. It is the destructive manifestations of tribalism that Abrahams is sensitive to, and he did not hold his peace when he saw these same manifestations in as unAfrican a place as a little village in France. He has recorded in Return to Goli that

> It was there [in the French village of Paley], among the French peasants, that I had come to realise the absurdity of colour judgements of any kind. I had found there the same prejudices and superstitions, the same 'backwardness', the almost tribal ways of living of Africa. This was the white counterpart of what made the whites of Africa call the dark folk there 'uncivilised'. (Goli, p. 31)

Abrahams knows that tribal man, in his much-reviled "state of nature," had some virtues which have been destroyed by aspects of European culture; he believes that tribal people were, before the advent of European machinery, vibrantly healthy and physically dynamic. While pondering about the "uglier side of tribalism," Mhendi, in Udomo, cannot help marvelling at the physical prowess and discipline of the tribal men who paddle the canoe which takes him part of the distance on his fatal return to guerilla activity in the Pluralian jungles. Evidently speaking for Abrahams, Mhendi finds the canoeists "six of the most beautifully shaped men" he has ever seen, and he is fascinated by the "easy, tireless rhythm" with which they move: "Could ordinary mortals keep up this machinelike rhythm hour after hour? His father, as a young man, had performed feats of endurance such as these canoeists now did. Men in the tribal state could still do this. Then the machine age caught up with them..." (Udomo, pp. 245, 246, and 247). Abrahams also praises tribal societies in Africa for their relative lack of colour prejudice:

> Being black is a small matter in tribal Africa because the attitude toward color is healthy and normal. Color does nor matter. Color is an act of God that neither confers privileges nor imposes handicaps on a man. A man's skin is like the day: ~~the~~ day is either clear or dark. There is nothing more to it until external agencies come in and invest it with special meaning and importance.[46]

Therefore, to conclude this first half of the discussion on Abrahams's "long eye of history," one may in all safety state emphatically that, while Abrahams can be a harsh commentator on African tribalism, his views are fair, dispassionate, and substantiated. Ogungbesan is right in his belief that "There is a...lack of cultural nationalism in Abrahams," but, clearly, the critic is wrong in his view that Abrahams "seems to have...accepted that the state of the black man before the coming of the white man was an era of darkness, in which the black man was only slightly better than a beast."[47] If Abrahams had such a low opinion of pre-European Africa, why would he pray for Africa's post-colonial leaders to "have the sense and the patience to preserve the finer qualities of the old ways and fuse these with the new..."?[48] Throughout his book on Abrahams, Ogungbesan consistently misunderstands the true reasons for Abrahams's desire to partake of the good things of western culture. Abrahams does not think that western culture is, in its entirety, superior to traditional African culture, but he believes that there is very little left in tribal tradition that can serve the practical and the emotional needs of human beings at this moment in history. As he says in "The Conflict of Culture in Africa," one of his most analytical essays, "The tribal structure served the needs of tribal man. The moral codes of tribal man were adequate to his time. The needs of modern man, the conditions under which modern man lives, demand new structures and new values."[49] These words do not indicate an aversion,on the part of Abrahams, to African culture; instead, they testify to Abrahams's sense of history, the sense which tells him that the reality of historical change in Africa will not vanish because of "The touching love of some anthropologists for the old ways."[50] It is also from this sense of history that Abrahams's idea of a collective global culture springs. "'Western European civilisation,' he argues, is not "something uniquely exclusive that owed nothing to non-European peoples such as the Chinese, the Indians, and the Egyptians...."[51] The real issue, to Abrahams, is not a choice between African culture and western culture; it is an understanding of the historical essence of culture, of the fluidity and the universality of culture. What is known as African culture today is, in significant part, also western culture; and western culture is, as Abrahams states, "the distillation and integration of many lands and peoples, sorted and sifted and added to until it can answer, more completely than any other, man's deepest needs in the technological present of the twentieth century."[52] In Abrahams's opinion, then, the western world is merely the current custodian of what is really a universal culture in a constant state of flux. "Western culture is a world culture," he asserts, "not 'reserved for Europeans only.'" [53]

Notes

[1] Peter Abrahams, "The Long View: African Writers' Part in the Battle against Racial Prejudice," African World (June, 1952), p. 11.

[2] Leo N. Tolstoy, What is Art? trans. Aylmer Maude (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1960), p. 52.

[3] Peter Abrahams, The View from Coyaba (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.11. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[4] Peter Abrahams, "We Can Learn to Be Color-Blind," The New York Times Magazine, 11 April 1965, p. 38.

[5] Chinua Achebe, Arrow of God, 2nd ed. (1964; rpt. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974), p. 229.

[6] Achebe, Arrow of God, p. 228.

[7] Peter Abrahams, Wild Conquest (New York, 1950; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 31. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[8] Peter Abrahams, Return to Goli (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 171. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[9] Kenneth Parker, "The South African Novel in English," in The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism and Society, ed. Kenneth Parker (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1978), p. 20.

[10] Herbert Tingsten, The Problem of South Africa, trans. Daniel Viklund (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1955), p. 11.

[11] Parker, p. 20. (The Mfecane refers to the state of violent upheaval within the South African hinterland between 1817 and 1834. Owing to the expansionist objectives of Chaka the Zulu, Zulu soldiers attacked neighbouring tribes who fled and, in their turn, attacked other tribes. The Bantu hinterland was consequently characterised by widespread warfare and considerable population movement.)

[12] Parker, p. 19.

[13] Andre Brink, "Introduction: a Background to Dissidence," in Mapmakers: Writing in a State of Siege (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 21.

[14] Brink, p. 19.

[15] Michael Wade, *Peter Abrahams* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1972), p. 95.

[16] Wade, pp. 210 and 211.

[17] Kolawole Ogungbesan, *The Writing of Peter Abrahams* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 79.

[18] Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 178.

[19] See Wade, pp. 75-76.

[20] George Padmore, as referred to in Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, "Tribute to W.E.B. Du Bois," in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses 1920-1963*, ed. Dr. Philip S. Foner (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1970), p. 328.

[21] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Honoring Dr. Du Bois," in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses 1890-1919*, ed. Dr. Philip S. Foner (New York: Pathfinder Press, Inc., 1970), p. 14.

[22] Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., p. 13.

[23] Peter Abrahams, *Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 298.

[24] Peter Abrahams, "The Meaning of Harlem," *Holiday*, 27 (June 1960), 140.

[25] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Address to the Nations of the World," in *W.E.B. Du Bois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses 1890-1919*, p. 125.

[26] Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London, 1957; rpt. New York: International Publishers Co. Inc., 1971), p. 52.

[27] Peter Abrahams, "The Blacks," in *An African Treasury*, ed. Langston Hughes (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1960), p. 47.

[28] Peter Abrahams, *A Wreath for Udomo* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 3. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[29] Richard Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 52.

[30] Amilcar Cabral, as quoted in Basil Davidson, *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 13.

[31] Kwame Nkrumah, "What I Mean by Positive Action," in *The Struggle Continues* (London: Panaf Books Ltd., 1973), p. 7.

[32] Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah, pp. 118-119.

[33] Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah, p. 123.

[34] John 11:35.

[35] Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah, p. 49.

[36] Peter Abrahams, "The Blacks," p. 44.

[37] Ali A. Mazrui, The Trial of Christopher Okigbo (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1971), pp. 27-28.

[38] Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature (Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Longman Group Ltd., 1981), p. 50.

[39] Shatto Arthur Gakwandi, The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977), p. 54.

[40] Ogungbesan, p. 113.

[41] Peter Abrahams "The Blacks," pp. 52 and 54.

[42] Peter Abrahams, "The Long View: African Writers' Part in the Battle against Racial Prejudice," p. 12.

[43] Nkosi, p. 51.

[44] Ogungbesan, p. 110.

[45] Akanji (Ulli Beier), Rev. of A Wreath for Udomo, by Peter Abrahams, Black Orpheus, No. 4, Oct. 1958, p. 57.

[46] Peter Abrahams, "The Blacks," p. 44.

[47] Ogungbesan, p. 12.

[48] Peter Abrahams, "The Blacks," p. 55.

[49] Peter Abrahams, "The Conflict of Culture in Africa," International Affairs, 30, No. 3 (July 1954), 304-312.

[50] Peter Abrahams, "The Conflict of Culture in Africa," 312.

[51] Peter Abrahams, "The Conflict of Culture in Africa," 306.

[52] Peter Abrahams, "The Conflict of Culture in Africa," 310.

[53] Peter Abrahams, "The Conflict of Culture in Africa," 312.

IV. 'The Long Eye of History': c. 1960 - c. 1979

It took Abrahams nearly a decade, after the publication of *A Wreath for Udomo* in 1956, to come out with his next novel. However, when he did produce one in 1965, it bore unmistakable marks of kinship with the two preceding novels. This novel, *A Night of Their Own*, depicts the logical outcome for South Africa, about a century later, of the mid-19th century events dramatised in *Wild Conquest*; there is even a blatant connexion between the two novels in the fact that Karl Van As of *A Night* is the great-great-grandson of Paul Van As of *Wild Conquest*. *A Night* also presents the catastasis of the Mhendi-Pluralia drama begun in *A Wreath for Udomo*, and examines in a different context the underlying theme of *Udomo*, namely, the conflict between human decency and political expediency.

The "night of evil" from which the people of South Africa are busy seeking deliverance is *of their own making*; herein lies the meaning of the title, "A Night of their Own." It is almost as if, in his choice of title, Abrahams is trying to establish a relationship between his novel and Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* which, like Abrahams's novel, describes a South African world of utter dereliction, misery, and terror. However, in *A Walk in the Night*, La Guma, for all his professed Marxism, casts his characters in what looks like an existentialist universe, whereas in *A Night of Their Own*, Abrahams, who has a demonstrated capacity for a providential view of things, is worldly enough to make all the different racial peoples of South Africa responsible for their calamity. The South Africa Abrahams portrays is the police state of the 1960s, the inevitable result of that country's history of conflagrant racism; it is a totalitarian state that one wishes were not a reflection of any country anywhere in the real world; it is the unfortunate product of, in the words of one of the novel's characters, "all the things minorities have always done throughout history when they have tried to hold power against the will of majorities."[1] In the conversation between Karl Van As (the deputy head of the Natal Bureau of Internal Security) and "the man from the Department of Records," Abrahams shows the extent to which South Africa's whites have turned their country into something close to what Orwell wrote *1984* to warn the world against. The Department of Records has carbon copies of "birth registration, school registration, the old-time pass registration, the old-time travel permits, residence permits, work permits, tax receipts, everything...." It watches the country's black population with an efficiency that Big Brother would have envied. Boasts the little man from Records:

> ...we can tell you not only when and where a Native was born, but also how much time he spent at school, when he took his first job and with whom, and how he was paid; we can also tell, almost to the hour, when he made his first trip from his village or location, where he went, when he arrived there, and how long he stayed. In fact, we have, in these files, an almost complete record of everything that happens to a Native from the moment of birth to the moment of death. He can do nothing of any importance without it coming into these files. (A Night, p. 141)

The whites, including some of the most politically powerful, are also victimised by their Frankenstein. "Just two days ago," the man from Records tells Van As, "my chief got a serious dresssing-down from a very senior Cabinet Minister because the Minister found out how complete a file we had on him" (A Night, p. 142). Even Van As, the important deputy chief of Security, is terrified of the monstrous state he serves, for this influential member of the Afrikaner community is deeply involved in "sixteen years of an odd kind of love" with a Coloured woman, Mildred Scott (A Night, p. 173). In a painful effort to explain to Mildred why he has stayed away from her for two years, Van As finally gives the true reason: "I was afraid.... Oh, Mildred! I was afraid what they might say and do, if they caught us. They are my people" (A Night, p. 174). One is reminded here of Orwell's remark, in "Shooting an Elephant," that "when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys."[3]

The reason for such needless totalitarianism in South Africa is the historical one, the same reason for which, as Wild Conquest shows, the Great Trek took place: the South African white man's irrational fear of whatever he perceives as a threat to his privileged position. In A Night of Their Own, Dr. Ludwig Snel, head of the Natal Bureau of Internal Security, tries to explain this fear:

> To this day I don't think I can honestly say what we were afraid of. The ultimate loss of political power to the Africans? Yes, that was part of it. The guilty fear that they might do unto us what we had done unto them? Yes, that too. The fear of wholesale miscegenation? This one I'm not sure of. After all, it is we, the whites, who took the initiative in bringing the Coloureds into being.... That was a nice way of exploiting and feeding the sex jealousies of the male white, no more: he wanted to have no competition where his own woman was concerned and yet he wanted to be free to have his fling with the others. (A Night, p. 138)

In his essay, "The Challenge of Fear," Alan Paton too tries to explain the political consequences of fear:

> Fear of change is, no doubt, in all of us, but it most afflicts the man who

> fears that any change must lead to loss of his wealth and status. When this fear becomes inordinate, he will, if he has political power, abrogate such things as civil rights and the rule of law, using the argument that he abrogates them only to preserve them. In my own country, the government, in order to preserve Christian civilization, uses methods incompatible with Christianity and abrogates values which are essential to any civilization which calls itself Christian. If only a man would say, "I do this because I'm afraid," one could bear it; but when he says, "I do this because I'm good," that is a bit too much.[3]

In A Night, it is as a protector of the public good that the man from Records imagines himself when he says, "I don't know why, but most people are wary of a government that has a complete record of their lives. Can't see anything wrong with it myself" (A Night, p. 142). But the joke (if it may be called that) is on the man from Records. What the reader finds wrong with him is the fact that he is so sinister that he is nameless, and that he is one of a handful "on whom nobody can keep files" (A Night, p. 143). He is the perfect embodiment of tyranny by the minority--the condition towards which South Africa has gravitated inexorably since the woeful days of the Great Trek.

If South Africa's blacks are victims, they are also, in Abrahams's view, oppressors whose bloody potential was seen in the 1949 Durban riots, the ever-present slice of documented history in the fiction of A Night. In the province of Natal, where blacks and Indians have had a longer period of contact than the two groups have had anywhere else in the country, the black people have long resented what has seemed to them the comparatively privileged life of the Indian population. Unlike the blacks, the Indians have always been free from the cumbersome and humiliating pass laws and, like the Jews in Eastern Europe during the inter-war years, they have played a conspicuous role in domestic commerce. It is a psychological fact of life that an oppressed group is often, in many petty ways, more intolerant of racism from another oppressed group than it is of the dominant racism of the master group. So it is with the black people of South Africa who find unbearable any discrimination from the slightly luckier Indians. Mphahlele illustrates this point well in his book, The African Image:

> For instance, there are two Indian-owned cinemas in Johannesburg--the Lyric and the Majestic. For a long time Africans have been going to these houses and made to sit in front, near the screen. The back rows were for Indians and Coloured, and it didn't matter how much the African could afford to pay. I remember the burning hurt I felt on the two occasions I went to each of these cinemas. Then I stopped going there altogether. So did a number of other Africans.[4]

As with many violent conflicts with deep-rooted causes, the Durban riots were activated by a minor incident--in this case, by an exchange between an Indian shop assistant and a black boy. Fifty Indians were killed in the riots, about five hundred of them were injured, and many of their shops were destroyed.

It is obvious, in A Night, that Abrahams attaches no significance to the fact that, in the riots, more blacks (about ninety of them) died than Indians; he simply--and deliberately, it seems--omits this fact from the novel. He is not interested in dramatising the root causes of the conflict, nor is there any indication in the novel that he considers important Mphahlele's view that "The English openly incited the Africans against the Indians in those riots."[3] In A Night, then, Abrahams has clearly invoked the artistic licence which has allowed him to select what historical material is useful for his purpose and to ignore what is not, in order to be able to emphasize what is to him the significant truth of the matter, namely, that the blacks must not be allowed to evade responsibility for their barbaric slaughter of the Indians. What angers Abrahams is the fact that the blacks attacked the Indians and attacked brutally, not what caused the attacks or who condoned them. This is why, in A Night, he casts the spotlight through flashback on the fatal clubbing of an Indian. Dee Nunkhoo, an Indian, recounts the incident to Richard Nkosi, a black:

> I was in a taxi on Durban's Esplanade, coming from the ship. On the road I saw two strapping young Zulu fellows chasing a skinny little Indian. The Indian taxi driver wouldn't stop. He said they would kill us as well. Anyway, one of the two caught up with the little Indian and hit him with his big knobkerrie. I was looking out of the back of the taxi and I saw the little Indian die. I swear I know the moment he died. I felt it a split second after the huge stick had split the back of his head. His momentum carried him on a few yards and then he folded up like a limp sack, his bones turned to jelly.... I saw two others.... And when I got home I heard our younger brother had been killed the night before.... (A Night, p. 48)

Abrahams is also saddened by the behaviour of some black revolutionary groups during the early sixties, the period in which the novel is set. He deplores Pogo, the most extremist of the black liberation groups, whose predilection was for "the methods of the counter-terror," and he criticises the habit, among the so-called Africanists, of "repudiating and denouncing all co-operation between black and white" (A Night, p. 60). But what he finds more shocking than the methods of Pogo and those of the "Africanists" is "the apparent warmth with which the African masses welcomed the stand of" these extremist groups (A Night, p. 61). Actually, these criticisms are, as they appear in A Night, voiced not by the novelist, but by one of his characters, the Indian resistance leader Sammy Naidoo. However, there can be no doubt that it is Abrahams the intrusive narrator characteristically expressing his views through a character; for, in Return to Goli, Abrahams has already warned black people that the fact of their unfreedom does not make them morally infallible:

> Large numbers of them [Negroes] are turning their backs on the dream of the last level of living and hugging about them the dark void in which there are no stars, no moon, and, of course, no laughter.... many Negroes have arrived at a position where they would counter the white bigot's race-hatred with race-hatred against whites. (Goli, pp. 20-21)

The Indians, more than any other racial group in A Night, enjoy Abrahams's sympathy and admiration. The reasons for this, dramatised and hinted at in the novel, have already been explicitly presented in the factual report, Return to Goli, where Abrahams debunks the myth of Indian privilege. First, he reminds us, in Goli, of the sad historical reason for the Indian presence in South Africa. The "Dark serfs with straight hair and sharp features were brought from across the dark waters to make good the labour shortage" created by the rebellious Zulus of nineteenth century Natal. The "Dark serfs" were, of course, poor Indian peasants who readily seized this economic opportunity, especially because they were promised that they could, "after completion of their period of indenture, choose either to remain in the new country as citizens or return to the land of their birth" (Goli, p. 81). Then, Abrahams cites specific instances of anti-Indian legislation passed by a white citizenry become alarmed by the hard-working and competitive nature of the Indians:

> The Transvaal was the first to act. It denied Indians all citizen rights in 1885. Six years later the Orange Free State banned Indians completely.... Natal turned on the Indians she had been so anxious to bring into the country. Natal imposed a L3 tax on each Indian at the end of his period as an indentured labourer. Next it withdrew the Indian vote. Next, in 1897, it outlawed marriage betweeen Indian and White. Soon there was total prohibition of all immigration from Asia. In 1924 the Indians were deprived of their municipal vote in Natal. (Goli, p. 82)

This is the background of anti-Indian hostility against which must be placed the spectacle of limited business prosperity the Indians had made by the 1950s and the 1960s. For Abrahams does not deny that, compared to the blacks , the Indians of South Africa have achieved a certain level of mercantile success. He tells us, in Goli, that some Indians, albeit "Less than 5 per cent of the total Indian population," are "successful merchants and businessmen." Some of these, he adds, "have made vast fortunes" and "have tried to invest their money wisely" in real estate (Goli, p. 83). In A Night, one notable member of this class of successful Indians is Doctor Dawood Nunkhoo, "a handsome upper-class Hindu of wealthy family who had the best education Europe could offer and money could buy" (A Night, p. 37); another is Old Man Nanda, "the richest Indian in the land" (A Night, p. 213). Abrahams's point, then, is not that the Indians have not fared better than the blacks; it is that Indian mercantile prosperity, which in truth is so limited that it does not justify the resentment of blacks, has been exaggerated impudently. He declares in Goli:

> One of the most popular and most successful South African lies is the picture of 365,000 Indians all rolling in dubiously acquired wealth, buying up White residential areas and turning them into slums, exploiting Blacks, and cooking up horrible plots for turning South Africa, and indeed the whole of the African east coast, into a colony of India.
>
> The truth is the complete opposite of this Hollywoodish picture of 'oriental villainy.' (Goli, p. 83)

Abrahams admires the Indians because their history in South Africa is, despite the hostilities Indians have suffered from blacks, full of instances of their willingness to cooperate with the blacks in the struggle against apartheid. In 1952, only three years after the 1949 riots, the Indians of Kimberley teamed up with the blacks of that city in a protest against the municipal ban on the home-brewing of beer. The South African Jewish writer, Dan Jacobson, tells us in an essay, "Riot in Kimberley," that "In that campaign six thousand Africans and Indians had gone peacefully to jail in practically every town of importance in South Africa, including Kimberley."[6] In A Night of Their Own, the Indian resistance leader Sammy Naidoo explains to the black fugitive Richard Nkosi how Indians have had to beg blacks in the underground movement "for an opportunity to prove the commitment of the Indians; we have to beg for a chance to make our contribution" (A Night, p. 61). Sammy Naidoo explains why the Indians should desperately join forces with the blacks: "Whether we like it or not, we must work our passage into the movement and into the future. If we fail, we'll have no future here. This, whatever we feel or think of it, is the hard reality of the Indian situation" (A Night, p. 61). In fact, the story of A Night of Their Own is, among other things, a celebration of Indian-black cooperation--and it is to the Indians that Abrahams gives thanks for this. The story itself is simple: Richard Nkosi sneaks into South Africa in an attempt to deliver funds to the black underground movement and quickly slip back out to England. However, what Abrahams keeps constantly before the reader is the contribution of

Natal's Indians to Nkosi's mission, a contribution so indispensable that, without it, Nkosi's enterprise would have been nipped in the bud. Abrahams especially admires the efforts of men like Sammy Naidoo to join the blacks in the struggle because, as he sees it, the Indians have no logical reason for believing that their future under black rule will be better than their present conditions under white domination. A political sophisticate like Sammy Naidoo may be disposed to striving for Indian-black cooperation, but the simple-hearted Dicky Naicker knows the true sentiments of the many Indians in whose midst he lives. For, not withstanding the efforts of activists like Sammy Naidoo to bring Indians and blacks together, Dicky Naicker is accutely aware that, "The majority of Indians...know everything won't be fine and it might be worse and so they say what is the sense to fight for something that may make it worse for us" (A Night, p. 111). That such misapprehension may yet prove to have some basis has been made disturbingly possible by the fate Indians suffered under the black tyranny of Uganda's Idi Amin in 1972.

The political maturity of South Africa's Indians is the main reason for which Abrahams esteems them highly. Abrahams respects their ability, uncharacteristic of underprivileged groups, to develop considerable immunity against feelings of inferiority. Very conscious of the richness of their own cultural heritage, they stubbornly refuse to ape the whites liberally; instead, they take great pride in their unassimilability. These attributes have helped to give the Indians an enviable ability at qualitative political strategy, an ability which Abrahams observed first-hand before he departed from South Africa in 1939. He says in Return to Goli: "I was a member of their [the Indians'] Liberal Study Group and watched young men like Seedat, Amra and Meer, in co-operation with Manilal Gandhi, work out the new approach that was to lead to today's joint Indian and Black defiance of unjust laws" (Goli, p. 90). Abrahams does not forget, in Goli, to make honourable mention of the most famous Indian of this century, Mahatma Gandhi: "It was in South Africa, in protest against all the disabilities under which the Indians lived, that a young Indian lawyer named M.K. Gandhi first used the technique of non-violent resistance. Gandhi fought the South African Government in a series of dramatic struggles from 1911 onwards. Then he went over to India to lead a nation to its freedom" (Goli, p. 83). Abrahams's expression of respect for Gandhi develops into a laudation of the Asiatic country which gave birth to the Mahatma:

> Today the leaders of that free nation that Gandhi fathered are among the most sane and humane of the world's statesmen. Today that free nation has taken the cause of the Indians of South Africa on to the floor of the United Nations. But, more important than that, that free nation, whose view of life Gandhi fathered, has assumed, and been accorded by the vast bulk of the newly awakening Africans, the role of moral leader in the fight for human liberty and dignity. (Goli, p. 83)

"And all this," Abrahams reminds us, "is part of the heritage of the South African Indians" (Goli, p. 83). In A Night, in the dramatic way in which the Indians disguise Nkosi and spirit him off to safety on an isolated farm in the hills of Natal, Abrahams graphically illustrates the organisational competence of the Indians. First, the two ladies of the Nunkhoo household, Dee and Cissie, go to work on Nkosi's negroid features. With admirable make-up artistry, they transform the coppery brown colour of Nkosi's face, neck and ears into the lustreless black complexion of an Indian, they darken his arms and his hands, they change "the shape of his nose by a line of stain here and there,...reduce the size of his forehead...change the shape of his eyes...," and they "reduce the fullness of his lips" (A Night, pp. 97-98). Then, Dicky Naicker guides Nkosi out of the Nunkhoo house and onto a street where they try to mingle with a religious procession which is closely watched by apartheid detectives with sunglasses. We see the young Dicky Naicker in all his experience and sophistication as he instructs Nkosi to walk at an even pace in order not to arouse suspicion, to wave back in apparent recognition of people who wave at them, and to "Smile and make like you are talking" (A Night, p. 103). The Indian underground is so successful that it has even managed to infiltrate Natal's apartheid security establishment; for it is to the efficiency and solid structure of his movement that Dicky Naicker alludes when he informs Nkosi that "...Corporal Singh, Political Division, Natal C.I.D., is also a member of our movement" (A Night, p. 106).

Abrahams's criticism of the role of South Africa's blacks in the "night of their own" is balanced by the homage he pays to the non-racist, non-violent heroes of the black anti-apartheid movement. Evidently speaking for Abrahams, Sammy Naidoo, in A Night, praises "the people who led the Congress before it was banned" in 1960. With affection, he remembers "the moderates," the "people who urged restraint and who deplored the matching of a white racialism with a black racialism," the people of whom "Luthuli [1961 Nobel Peace Prize Winner] was, and still is, the great spokesman..." (A

Night, p. 60). It is not for nothing that the novel's dedicatees are "WALTER SISULU and NELSON MANDELA and all the others, the captured and the still free..." (A Night, the dedication). It is of these dedicatees that an early reviewer of A Night spoke when he said with understandable hyperbole:

> History will yet record that mankind has never produced greater heroes than these, in a war where the forces are so unevenly balanced, available support for the "hunters" far outweighing that for the hunted; where considerations of financial interests supercede those of justice and decency, and the worst forms of barbarism are aided and abetted in the names of constitutionality and anti-communism.[7]

Nelson Mandela, in particular, seems to have more than dedicatory significance in A Night. To an extent, albeit a very limited one, the character of Richard Nkosi is based on the legend of the Black Pimpernel, the accolade given to Mandela in the early 1960s when, in the words of Oliver Tambo, Mandela "lived in hiding, meeting only his closest political associates, travelling round the country in disguise, popping up here to lead and advise, disappearing again when the hunt got too hot."[8] To Abrahams the romantic, the legend of the outlaw hero depends for its endurance on the hero's ability to evade capture. Therefore, in an attempt to immortalise a real-life legend which he seems to think came to an end with the apprehension of Mandela in 1962, Abrahams makes the fugitive hero of A Night uncatchable in the country with the most formidable security network in all of Africa. Abrahams's romantic attraction to the elusive outlaw is discernible in Nkosi's explanation to Old Man Nanda, from whom he seeks help for his escape, of the consequences of his capture. "Two things will happen," Nkosi tells the old man, "the myth will be destroyed and the hope for victory...will be shattered for a long time to come..." (A Night, p. 249). Abrahams's romantic feelings for the elusive outlaw can also be seen in the following outburst of frustration by Van As's superior:

> We want that man [Nkosi], Karl! We want him badly.... A myth is being created and that is always dangerous. At illegal meetings in Pretoria and Johannesburg and all up and down the Reef there has been talk about a new underground hero who cannot be captured and who cannot be killed because he is the spirit of freedom and is therefore invincible. It's popping up all over the place, boy! (A Night, p. 161)

Such romanticism in fiction--and it is most noticeably there in the character of Macheath in John Gay's Beggars' Opera--is, of course, often divorced from what obtains in the real world. Throughout the violent political history of Africa, the capture and imprisonment of famous political fugitives has never killed the political myths about them. In detention or in jail, the outlaw leader simply grows larger than life; such was the case with Nkrumah and Kenyatta, and such is the case with Mandela today.

It is in its preoccupation with the ethics of political methods that A Night of Their Own is a sequel to A Wreath for Udomo. Like Udomo, Nkosi is engaged in dangerously rebellious political activity, but there is a daily beauty in Nkosi's life that makes Udomo ugly by comparison. Nkosi is the stereotypical artist with a sensitive soul, a tender and compassionate man without a trace of the ruthless singlemindedness which defines Udomo's whole personality. Nkosi risks his life to smuggle money to the South African underground movement, but he recoils in disgust from the kind of efficiency which makes his South African Indian friends murder a man out of political necessity. Nkosi concedes that he can live with the spontaneous killings which take place in uprisings or in acts of sabotage, but not with "the straightforward and simple murdering of one man, a poor brute who helped us, too" (A Night, p. 58). Sammy Naidoo, on the other hand, invokes the argument of Udomo, "The right of necessity, of history, of survival" (A Night, p. 58). His life and Udomo's make poignant the validity of W.B. Yeats's warning to his compatriots in the Irish resistance, the warning that "Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart."[9] It is no surprise that, for love and affection, Dee Nunkhoo crosses the colour line to Nkosi, the only man in her circle whose heart is unaffected by Medusa.

The issue in Abrahams's historical fiction, then, is not, contrary to Michael Wade's implications, a vascillation in authorial viewpoint between sympathy for political action in Wild Conquest and Udomo and a "rejection of almost all kinds of action" in A Night.[10] The issue is the age-old liberal obsession with the tension between morality and political imperative; thus explained, this issue is there in all Abrahams's historical novels. In Coyaba, Wild Conquest and Udomo, there is as much condemnation of inhumane political conduct as there is praise for liberating political action. It is the same in A Night of Their Own where Abrahams is concerned with distinguishing the liberating political action of Nkosi from the terrorism of Sammy Naidoo. However, Abrahams does not make simplistic distinctions. He places equally powerful arguments in the mouths of both Sammy Naidoo and Nkosi and, thereby, stops his and Nkosi's point of view from being solidly unchallengeable. For even as we admire Nkosi's noble-mindedness, we cannot rid ourselves of the feeling that this artist-spokesman has too idealised a view of the world;

and, although we turn our eyes from Sammy Naidoo's terror methods, we cannot deny that they are indispensable to Nkosi's protection. In a situation where the pacifist enjoys the protection of the violent, the choice between pacifism and violence becomes painfully difficult. Dee Nunkhoo tries to make Nkosi understand; she explains to him that, if Sammy Naidoo had not had Westhuizen killed, "He [Westhuizen] could lead them [the police] to Sammy and you" (A Night, p. 57). Dee, as Wilfred Cartey observes, "sees realistically the horrible truth of social circumstances in South Africa." She knows that "The outer world is always present, impinging upon an individual's more idealistic, romantic notions."[11] Abrahams is, as it were, thinking aloud and, through Sammy Naidoo, flinging at us the unpleasant truths which constitute an inextricable aspect of revolutionary political action.

Another cornucopia of such unpleasant truths is This Island Now, published in 1966, the only novel by Abrahams which is not even partially set in Africa. It is with a loud bang that Albert Josiah, the novel's central character, assumes the presidency of the unnamed Carribean island in which the novel is set. He is a man who believes that the island's mercantile community "exercises a power and an influence out of all proportion to the contribution it makes"; in typical man-of-the-people style, he fashions a programme which is meant "to bring into play a new pattern of power relations in which more value and importance and honour will be accorded those people who contribute more to the productive wealth of the nation."[12] Overwhelmingly supported by the predominantly black electorate of the country, Josiah soon introduces legislation which compels "all foreign companies on the island...to sell half their shares to local investors," which restricts "the freehold ownership of property" to the island's natives, and which allows foreigners to lease property only "up to a maximum time period of twenty-five years" (This Island, p. 147). Josiah's offensive on the business community is successful and popular, but it would not have been possible had he hesitated to do some very cruel and unconstitutional things.

First, Josiah forces the premature retirement of John Stanhope, an upright man whose position as Presidential Secretary makes him the head of the country's civil service. Stanhope incurs Josiah's enmity when he tries to stop the President from making his own appointments to the public service. Stanhope opposes this obvious political move by the President to fill the public service with his supporters because, as he reminds Josiah, "In the interest of a non-political and independent public service those who framed our Constitution saw fit to put all civil service appointments in the hands of the Services Commission and provided freedom from pressure to that Commission" (This Island, pp. 161-162). But Stanhope wastes his breath; Josiah is, in the tradition of Machiavelli and Bismarck, a pragmatist who believes that the end justifies even foul means. Like Sammy Naidoo in A Night and Michael Udomo, Josiah is in the business of revolutionary politics with both eyes open, and he is ruthless, resilient, and willing to pay any price. If Stanhope insists that the Constitution must be respected, then, as Josiah tells the young Andrew Simpson, "The law and regulations governing the Services Commission will have to be changed..."(This Island, p. 163). Josiah senses a need to justify his dictatorial ways to Simpson who, although a supporter of the President, is a protege of Stanhope. Josiah is careful to give Stanhope his due; he tells Simpson that Stanhope is "a decent and honest man who has served his country faithfully..." (This Island, p. 165). But "what are we to do," he asks Simpson, "Abandon everything because one man, an honourable but misguided man, stands in our way?" (This Island, p. 164) Political necessity dictates that Josiah force Stanhope out of the country on a "six months' pre-retirement leave"; then it dictates that he make the country's public service toe the line (This Island, p. 171).

Another unpleasant truth about revolutionary politicians, that we see vividly in This Island, is that they have no regard for any such thing as a free press. Following a foiled coup plot, Maxwell Johnson, editor of The Voice of the Island, visits Josiah to protest the fact that the Government releases information to the state-controlled press but denies it to independent newspapers like his own. "We cannot as yet afford the kind of press you hold up as a virtue," Josiah explains with characteristic bluntness and, then, proceeds to give the editor a lecture on realpolitik: "For us, for our need, the press must be involved in the struggle to bring into being a completely new pattern of social and economic and political relations in the society. It must be an instrument of change serving the political will, much as I am an instrument of change serving the political will" (This Island, p. 211). Even in debate, Josiah's realpolitik is painfully evident; he throws fairness to the winds, executes a coup de theatre, and transforms what is essentially a debate on press freedom into a discourse on race. The issue is no longer who is for a free press and who is against it; the issue is now who is talking like a coloured man, that victim of the centuries, and who is talking like a pampered white man. Josiah tells Johnson:

> You are primarily concerned with the salvation of your individual soul. I am not that free. Between me and your kind of freedom stands a terrible wall which I and those like me cannot climb until we have achieved the salvation of our racial soul. Till then your concern about your individual soul is a rare and enviable luxury which I recognize longingly and then put behind me. Till then we cannot be individuals in the sense that you are and until we are all relations between white and coloured must be counterfeit by definition. (This Island, p. 211)

When Johnson gets to the heart of the matter and asks Josiah, "...you want a black or brown editor in my place," the President replies curtly, "Preferably black. I think you know that's why I agreed to see you" (This Island, p. 213).

These words and the general attitude of Josiah must not be construed to mean a justification, by Abrahams, of black counter-racism. Almost every line of fiction that Abrahams has written has been as much against the dominant white racism as against the fast-emerging black counter-racism. In This Island, Abrahams has been careful to present Josiah in such a way as to make it clear that he does not approve of Josiah's racism. Josiah justifies his every deed in the name of the invisible black masses; he argues that the masses "will only know that they are truly in power, that the dominance of the white skin has been removed when they see the whites doing some crawling too" (This Island, pp. 212-213). However, Abrahams shows that Josiah does not have the conviction of his pronouncements: why does the President get rid of a decent man like Johnson who has endeared himself to the island's non-whites, but strikes an alliance with Joel Sterning and the Isaacs, white profiteers who are much disliked by the black and the brown masses? Abrahams exposes Josiah for what he truly is, and the President stands revealed not as a man who acts in a racist fashion out of a genuine belief that such racism will help his people, but as a man who exploits his people's heightened sense of race for his own political good. Is he not, after all, the man whose "brownness...was striking" but who nevertheless "had projected so strongly the image of himself as a black man that everybody accepted him as a black man"? (This Island, pp. 158-159) As a practitioner of realpolitik and machpolitik, Josiah is interested not in the colour of people's skins, but in whether or not they will do his bidding.

It follows, therefore, that Mr. Justice Wright, a steadfast man who will not place himself at Josiah's beck and call, must; although he is black, be sacrificed; and with him, the twin concepts of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. In the most intense debate on political necessity in the novel, Justice Wright is pitted against Josiah and young Andrew Simpson, the man who has replaced Stanhope as Presidential Secretary. The issue at stake is the impending treason trial of Franklin F. Freeways, former Prime Minister and Minister of Financial Affairs. To Simpson, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the head of the military, and the head of the security forces, Josiah expounds the aims of the trial:

> Never forget for a moment...that primarily this is a political trial with very clearly defined aims. First, it will assert our authority in the land unmistakably for all our enemies to see, those at home and those abroad.... Second, it will make plain to all investors...that capital, foreign or local, will no longer be permitted to manipulate power in this land.... Third; and most important of all, this trial must make clear to the people in the hills and in the villages and in the fields and in the little shacks that this is their government exercising power on their behalf. They must see this trial as the assertion of their interests, the interests of the downtrodden and the dispossessed and the black, against the interests of the rich and the powerful and the fair.... (This Island, p. 218)

The President then asks Andrew Simpson to communicate these aims of the trial to Mr. Justice Wright, the President of the Supreme Court. Simpson finds the judge to be a formidable opponent in debate. "Don't these things bother you," the judge asks the young man, "The manipulation of the police and the civil service?" (This Island, p. 229) Simpson's debating style is lawyerly, and he performs his best, but after he has made his emotional pleas of political necessity, the judge states even more strongly his refusal to be influenced: "I'll defend and uphold the law against anyone because I believe that in the long run the law, independent and defending the letter and the spirit of the Constitution, is a greater guarantor of the real interests of the majority of the people than any one man, no matter how benevolent, wise, all-seeing or committed he might be" (This Island, p. 232). Even when he is in the pressurised presence of the powerful Josiah, the great judge refuses to budge. Justice Wright draws strength for his point of view from an event in the island's recent history. "You know your country's history, Mr. President," he tells Josiah, "so you will remember how your predecessor came to power. I was a very green young barrister when I defended, in my very first big case, an agitator called Moses Joshua who was accused of plotting the overthrow of the duly constituted government of the day." Wright goes on, "My point, Mr. President, is that the judge who presided at that trial judged the case on its merit in law solely. He was not an islander, not one of us by birth or colour. It would have been easy and understandable for him to have seen the political interests of his own country, the colonial power.... But he refused to and I won my case" (This Island, p. 236).

Wright wins the great debate on political necessity in This Island Now; this is not surprising because his point of view is so obviously right--why else is he so deliberately named "Wright"? Equally unsurprising are the fates of principled, holier-than-thou men like Wright and Maxwell Johnson on this Carribean island bestride which Josiah stands like a colossus. This is not the delightful island of Auden from whom Abrahams got the title for his novel. Here is the first stanza of Auden's "Look, Stranger":

> Look, stranger, on this island now
> The leaping light for your delight discovers,
> Stand stable here
> And silent be,
> That through the channels of the ear
> May wander like a river
> The swaying sound of the sea.[13]

Auden's stanza is a celebration as much of the power of the human senses as of the deep pleasures embedded in physical nature. It is a plea for man not to be a "stranger" to the natural environment around him. If only man will "stand stable," be "silent," and "Look on this island now," he will enjoy the beautiful scenery which is illuminated by "the leaping light" from the heavens, and he will enjoy "The swaying sound of the sea." In Abrahams's novel, the men who "look" discover not delights, but terrible potentialities in their country's government. Justice Wright and Maxwell Johnson, like John Stanhope before them, find it hard to be passive and "silent" in the face of mounting tyranny; and, once they speak out, Josiah sees to it that they can no longer "Stand stable." Johnson, now feeling like a "stranger" on the island where he has lived for forty years, decides to leave for good. In the saddest scene in the novel, Johnson thinks aloud : "...I arrived alone, with no one to welcome me: I leave alone with no one to say God-speed..." (This Island, p. 240). The fact that the journalist Martha Lee eventually arrives to see him off does not make Johnson's reflections fundamentally untrue. In Auden's poem, you are a "stranger" if you do not look at and perceive what is happening around you; in Abrahams's novel, you are made a "stranger" if you do. Justice Wright too is made to feel like a stranger on the island of his birth. He is first relieved of his position as President of the Supreme Court; then he is taken into custody because, if the President is to be believed, Wright "had tried to use his high office to give comfort and protection to the political enemies of the nation" (This Island, p. 244).

Is dictatorship justifiable in the context in which it is presented in This Island Now? Have there been times in history when it has been possible to justify dictatorship? Andrew Simpson says to Martha Lee: "There are people--not only here but all over what has become known as the third world--who will happily trade free speech and free institutions for three square meals a day, a roof over their heads and reasonable health services..." (This Island, p. 145). This argument is one that is often heard, but it is fallacious. If a leader can provide his people with food, shelter, and health care, he will not have reason to suppress their freedom. It is when a leader cannot provide his people with their basic needs that he resorts to suppressing free speech and free institutions in order to escape criticism and strong opposition. Any level-headed contemplation of the real world shows that countries where people are economically comfortable also enjoy far more freedom than countries where people cannot obtain their most basic needs. The chances are that a people "who will happily trade free speech...for three square meals a day..." do not, to begin with, have any free speech worth trading. This is the plight of Albert Josiah's people. The reality which operates in Josiah's country denies him any justification for his tyranny; for, after Josiah has turned the civil service, the press and the judiciary into organs of his political machine, he finds himself on a collision course with the very masses in whose name he has waged the revolution. In taking stock of his life and his policies, Josiah painfully concedes the fact that it is his "assault on the economic problems," not his political program, which has not been received well by the masses whom it is "almost impossible to persuade...to give some of their labour to the nation...without being paid" (This Island, p. 249). Hostility from the masses makes Josiah more of a tyrant. During one "unhappy week of rioting," Josiah uses so much force to control the situation that two hundred people are killed (This Island, p.249); and at the beginning of the final year of his first term of office, for fear that he will not be returned to power, he suspends elections until further notice. "The Revolution," says the central character in Georg Buchner's Danton's Death, "is like

Saturn, and devours her own childern."[14] The chilling wisdom in these words comes to Josiah towards the end of the novel: "To use force against the people themselves... that hurts in a way nobody understood" (This Island, p. 250). About two pages from the end of the novel, in the most didactic passage of all, Abrahams presents the tragedy of the visionary whose visions have begun to yield place to clear sight: "And for a moment, there in the moonlight, feeling as lonely as he had ever felt, doubt came to Albert Josiah. And fear touched him. And the thought that this way might be wrong, that this was not the road to freedom for his people" (This Island, p. 252).

Abrahams's most recent novel, The View from Coyaba, which takes us farthest back into history, also brings us closest to the present. The last section of the novel opens with a sustained tribute to Nkrumah, the former president of Ghana. In the highly novelistic A Wreath for Udomo, Abrahams had not been free to dramatise without ambivalence his view of Nkrumah's role in modern African history; now, in the last section of Coyaba, a section far more journalistic than novelistic, Abrahams lauds Nkrumah as the creator of "the great African dream of freedom...which flowered so brilliantly..." and because of which "nearly a score of African countries gained their political independence in one single year." "Nothing like that rush to independence," says Abrahams, "had ever happened in the history of any other continent..."[15] The year is 1972, the locale is Conakry (in Sekou Toure's Guinea), and the occasion is Nkrumah's funeral. However, although the spotlight is on Nkrumah, Abrahams assembles for the reader a number of the historical personages who have walked the Afro-Asian stage. There are Nehru of India, Nasser of Egypt, and Ben Bella of Algeria with all of whom Nkrumah had shared the dream, now fast becoming a contemptible idea, of "the earth's dark folk influencing the shape of the world by the moral quality of their leadership" (Coyaba, p. 322). These are the four men "who had shaped the Third World vision and the non-aligned dream," but, says Abrahams, Nkrumah was different from the other three. Nkrumah was "a complicated man with a confusion of motives and impulses," and he was "totally committed to African freedom. Not in the clear and starkly simple way of Ben Bella, or the visionary and almost religious way of Nasser, but totally committed" (Coyaba, pp. 322-323). The other dream-makers who appear in Coyaba (and whom we have already seen in Abrahams's fiction) are "the venerable Dr. DuBois who had nurtured the dream longest of all and George Padmore, the steady methodical organizer over the years" (Coyaba, p. 323). The death of the dream is reflected in the deaths or the fall from prominence of the dream-makers: "Kwame dead in exile at sixty-three and his dream in ashes all about us. DuBois gone too, at the ripe old age of ninety-five; and Padmore too. Nehru a year after DuBois, and Nasser two years ago, in his prime. Only Ben Bella left and he and his dream under house arrest by men of a more practical turn of mind" (Coyaba, p. 323). Politics has a sure way of turning dream into disappointing reality. This is why "DuBois must have died happiest of all....Yes, perhaps he was the greatest of the dream-keepers because he was not directly involved with the day-to-day politics of power..." (Coyaba, p. 323).

In an audacious invocation of the artistic licence of the historical novelist, Abrahams has Nkrumah buried in the Guinean capital of Conakry and, in case anyone misses this falsification of historical fact, he states directly: "At last it was over. Kwame Nkrumah's grave was not in his beloved Ghana" (Coyaba, p. 323). But the truth is that Nkrumah's grave is in his beloved Ghana, in his native town of Nkroful; given Abrahams's personal knowledge of and interest in Nkrumah, and given his close journalistic attention to detail that the pages of Coyaba testify to, he could not possibly have been ignorant of this fact during the thirteen years between 1972 (when Nkrumah died) and 1985 (when Coyaba was published). How, then, explain what is obviously a deliberate disregard for a historical fact?

To speculate on Abrahams's possible motives, one must understand something of Ghana's official view of Nkrumah in the years between his overthrow and his death, and the dramatic change in this official view in the days after his death. There was nothing surprising in the fact that the junta which ousted Nkrumah in 1966 denounced every one of his economic and political programs. The strange thing was the extent, the thoroughness, and the seeming endlessness of this denunciation and vilification of Nkrumah. A few months after the coup, in a government-prepared comic booklet which was sold on the streets of Accra and in boarding schools, Nkrumah was lampooned with the utmost crudity. Soldiers broke into homes and destroyed displayed photographs of Nkrumah and all insignia associated with his Convention People's Party. The new government issued decrees, in response to Nkrumah's broadcasts from Guinea to

Ghana, which forbade Ghanaians from having any form of contact with the exiled Nkrumah and from appearing resentful of his overthrow. When the civilian government of Dr. Busia was ushered in in 1969, a residue of this hostile official view, purged of the Draconism with which the military government had enforced it, remained. However, while Nkrumah was being denigrated in his native country, he was being idolised in a foreign country, Guinea, where he had been appointed co-President. About three months before Nkrumah's death in a Romanian hospital, Busia's civilian government was toppled by military officers friendly to Nkrumah; Ghana's official view of Nkrumah therefore changed. At first, President Sekou Toure of Guinea was not sure that Ghana was ready to treat Nkrumah's burial with the honour he thought it deserved, so he asked for Nkrumah's body to be returned to Guinea. However, after Ghana's new Head of State, Colonel Acheampong, had proven in a series of negotiations that he felt only too privileged to treat Nkrumah's burial with honour and respect, Sekou Toure released his friend's body for burial in Ghana where it was first laid in state in Accra.

Now, what Abrahams has done with the fact of the place of Nkrumah's burial is something that a professional historian would not dare do. In making Guinea bury Nkrumah in fiction, when Ghana did it in fact, Abrahams has sacrificed historical accuracy in order to sketch his own personal view of things, in order to judge Ghana as not deserving of the burial of the illustrious son it had treated so shamefully. Abrahams has interfered with history so as to give to Guinea the right of Nkrumah's burial, to indicate his admiration of the country which offered respectable sanctuary to the man who was once his own friend. What Abrahams is saying, in effect, is that it was Guinea, not Ghana, which had acted like Nkrumah's mother-country.

It is through the interior monologues of David Brown that Abrahams delivers his commentary on Nkrumah's funeral. David is the son of Jacob Brown whom we last saw doing missionary work in Liberia. David and his father are as unlike each other as two well-meaning men can be. David has not chosen the way of God; he is a practical man of action who believes in necessary violence. He once worked as a medical doctor in Algeria and, during the revolutionary struggle which culminated in the Algerian War of Independence in the mid-1950s, he fought for Ben Bella's National Liberation Front. His frequently stinging criticisms of his father's priestly calm in a world of racial and political strife have often seemed to strain their relationship to breaking point, but they have miraculously left the love between father and son unscathed. At this time, in 1972, Jacob Brown is a retired bishop in Uganda, and, as soon as Nkrumah's funeral in Guinea is over, David begins to hurry to Uganda to rescue his father before Amin has "had time to give full rein to his murderous impulses against Christian missions in general and his father's mission in particular" (Coyaba, p. 332).

It is this ugly picture of Idi Amin's Uganda which looms large in the last hundred pages of The View from Coyaba. Jacob Brown has been running his mission in Uganda since the last years of the colonial rule of that country. He has seen and felt the violent effects of both colonialism and the first black government of the country, but Uganda could still justifiably be called "the most stable, orderly and peaceful country in Africa" (Coyaba, p. 317)--that is, until the advent of Amin. John Chitole, the Ugandan who is Jacob's protege and who has succeeded him as bishop, has no doubt that Amin is a bloodhound gone mad. In reply to his (Chitole's) wife who thinks that Amin "wouldn't dare touch" Jacob, Chitole says: "Wouldn't he?...He bombed the Kabaka's Palace; he seized power from the man who in his foolish arrogance made him what was supposed to be the puppet commander of the army; he used the Jews, then threw them out; he orders murder and plunder without hesitation.... What is an old missionary bishop to him?" (Coyaba, p. 345) Abrahams gives us a feel of the country's mood in the days when Uganda's air was saturated with rumours about Amin's impending expulsion of the Asians. Michael Odera, an administrator in Jacob's church, explains to Chitole that the rumours are more than rumours:

> ...the idea of frightening the Asians is not unattractive to people who have been the victims of their prejudice. So it could be just talk to see the welcome new nervousness replacing the old arrogance in Asian eyes. But the talk persisted and was always the same: all Asians would be ordered to leave the country and to leave their possessions and property behind.... When I heard it from two senior officials in the district I knew it was more than empty talk to frighten the Asians.... (Coyaba, pp. 350-351)

There is incidental satiric comedy in these pages of Coyaba, and its main butt is Amin's soldiers. A young soldier, Captain Musaka, is sent by his superior, Colonel Idrisi, to extort some "tribute" from Jacob and Chitole. Musaka's mock-bravura fails to impress the two experienced bishops who see in him a redeemable soldier who is not yet used to killing. Jacob's calculated sermonising proves mightier than Musaka's pistols, and the young captain finds himself on the defensive throughout. We cannot help being amused when we see Musaka trying to remember that he is supposed to be an unthinking, ruthless soldier: "...I must not allow myself to be trapped by this old man's way with words. I must not allow his peacefulness to drown me. I am a soldier. That is not what Idrisi sent me here for. The wrath of Idrisi is terrible. A soldier must not relax with our enemies, and I am a soldier and these are our enemies..." (Coyaba, p. 357). Jacob continues to preach the sacredness of integrity, truth and human life, and Musaka grows increasingly unsure of his soldierly abilities. The Captain says to himself: "I will not let him mesmerize me with words. If he goes on with this I will call in the soldier with the gun to be witness and so that there will be two of us against two of them. He must understand the power is with us, not with them..." (Coyaba, p. 359). In the end, Musaka's desperation becomes unbearable, and he decides to do what he came there for, and get out. He appeals to the bishops: "I mean you no harm so stop it! Do not make it worse for yourselves. Give me tribute, something to take back: money and a promise of food--something I can take back--and I will try to get them to agree to leave you alone. Do you understand what I am saying?" (Coyaba, p. 360) Abrahams has reduced Captain Musaka to the level of a begging coward and made him the object of our amusement, contempt and pity. However, it is clear that the novelist's intention has not been to present Musaka as a soldier degraded beyond repair. He tells us that Musaka is a man in whom "respect [for elders] was an historically built-in tribal instinct" which is capable of transcending "the new militarism he wore so uneasily" (Coyaba, p. 360). Abrahams's point seems to be that it would not be such a shocking thing if the men who did Amin's killings were irredeemable thugs and assasins. What is sad is the thought that many of Amin's "angels of death" must once have been considerably decent men like Musaka--until their souls were corrupted and possessed by the devil, Idi Amin Dada.

In imminent danger from Idi Amin, Jacob, with great reluctance and after much encouragement from Chitole, leaves Uganda for his native country, Jamaica. Jacob and Emma Butari, Chitole's wife, secretly cross the border into Kenya from where they are whisked into Ethiopia by David and some volunteers, men alongside whom David had once fought in Algeria. Then, by helicopter, Jacob, Emma, and David all go to Coyaba in Jamaica's Red Hills. The morning after Jacob and Emma leave Uganda, Amin's soldiers, led by Colonel Idrisi, visit Jacob's church and commit unspeakable brutalities: they burn the church down, and kill Chitole.

Abrahams's search through history, which begins in the Jamaica of the 1530s, ends in the Jamaica of the late 1970s. It is clear that, in The View from Coyaba, Abrahams has a literary relationship with his central character, Jacob Brown. He and Jacob have moved in opposite directions: Abrahams from his native Africa to Jamaica, and Jacob from his native Jamaica to Africa. In the last chapter of the novel, we see Jacob, seven years after his return to Jamaica, working on his memoirs and we realise, as the following passage makes clear, that Abrahams's The View from Coyaba and Jacob's memoirs tackle the same historical theme: "It [Jacob's manuscript] would make a wonderful book, a fine record of Grandpa's [Jacob's] work as a missionary, of the origins and outlook of his church, of the many-sided struggles of black people in the twentieth century, and the role of one particular black family in those struggles" (Coyaba, p. 389). Even as Jacob is busy writing his memoirs, the "many-sided struggles of black people" are being dramatised before his very eyes, in 1979 Jamaica. This is the violent period immediately preceding the elections, in 1980, which will remove the socialist government of Michael Manley from power. There is a long discussion among Jacob, Emma, and David about the state of Jamaican politics and, from the characters'--especially David's--comments, one senses that Abrahams is at once sympathetic to and critical of Manley's government. The novelist's sympathy is engendered by his belief that Manley's government is being deliberately victimised by international capitalism. When David points out that the guns used in the Jamaican violence are M16s which are American weapons, Emma (now David's wife) replies that the M16s could have been brought to Jamaica by the Vietnamese who captured them in their war with America. "The question is," David clinches his point, "did they [the Vietnamese] then ship them [the M16s] to Cuba to ship to Jamaica in order that ghetto youth should kill each other? Could be; but it is much more likely that they [the M16s] came from a stockpile in the Florida area" (Coyaba, p. 403). He also observes that the capitalist democracies have an interest in turning Jamaica excessively violent since such violence demoralises the population and underscores "the inability of those in control to control the situation" (Coyaba, p. 404). This is the extent of Abrahams's sympathy for the Manley government, the natural sympathy in decent people for the underdog. Abrahams then criticises Manley's attempt at revolution, and his criticism is little different from Friedrich Engels's analysis of the ill-timed and unrealistic revolution. Commenting on an abortive peasant uprising in sixteenth century Germany, Engels wrote: "The worst thing that can befall the leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over the government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the domination of the class he represents, and for the realization of the measures which that domination would imply."[16] Similarly, in Coyaba, David Brown criticises a revolutionary Manley who seems blind to the social reality in which he is operating:

> No government of a society as divided by deeply entrenched colour and class interests as this can seriously expect to transform that society by way of consensus. It cannot be done; dominant people and classes always fight to hold on to what they have, no matter how it was acquired. Not to see and understand that reality and still to embark on the politics of revolution is at once romantic and brutally cruel to those who are the foot soldiers of that revolution. (Coyaba, p. 406)

Political discussions of this kind constitute the remaining content of The View from Coyaba. The passage of time too comes to a halt in the more recent past, in 1979 or 1980. Idi Amin's overthrow by Tanzanian troops is imminent, a matter of weeks if not of days, and Jacob's church in Uganda has appealed to him to return.

How keen or perceptive, then, is Abrahams's "long eye of history"? What is the power and scope of its scanning of black history? Ultimately, how clear is Abrahams's view from Coyaba? The phrase and title, "The View from Coyaba" has both a literal and a figurative application. Literally, "Coyaba" is the name of Abrahams's hill-top residence in Jamaica. "I have named this house of ours Coyaba, which is an Arawak word meaning 'heaven,' 'peace,' 'tranquillity,'" Abrahams explains in a 1965 essay, "because I have found a large measure of these states of mind on this high hill in Jamaica."[17] However, as soon as the literal meaning and reference of "Coyaba" are understood, the phrase, "the view from Coyaba" gains additional significance. The fact that Coyaba is on a hill makes the view from it the view from a point of vantage. Abrahams is, if one may hyperbolise light-heartedly, like Matthew Arnold's Shakespeare; he is like the personified "loftiest hill" who made "the heaven of heavens his dwelling place," who "didst the stars and sunbeams know...."[18] Figuratively, then, the view from Coyaba is the view of a man in maturity, of an aging man with an unaging intellect. This man has, since his younger days, soberly and consistently contemplated the history of the relationship between the white races and the darker peoples of this world. He has also noted--and this has often made him sad and angry--that the darker peoples' attempts at their own emancipation have lagged woefully behind their lamentable capacity for self-destruction. From Coyaba, therefore, the view is one of the history of oppression and injustice, racial or otherwise. Within the vision of Abrahams's "long eye" is the history of oppression between 1530 and the present day, and it is a history that has played itself out in vastly different parts of the world, between races and within races. But Abrahams's "long eye" has not only scope but also power, a power breathed into it by a humanistic political mind, by what Stephen Spender once called "The politics of the artist...the politics of the unpolitical, embraced for the sake of life and not of politics."[19]

Abrahams's "politics of the artist" is glaringly evident in his belief that there is a historical progression from the lowest level to the highest level that everyone should encourage in his personal life. On the first and lowest level, Abrahams believes, is the basic and instinctive struggle for food, shelter, and security; on the second level is the desire to be identified with a group, be it a tribe, a race, or a nation; but on the last level, Abrahams emphasises, "the mind takes hold of the instinct," and "The will casts out fear" (Goli, p. 26). This last level is the level on which life is lived fully; it marks the point at which an individual is capable of living according to the dictates of his conscience, not according to group ideology; it is that mature phase in life at which a person acquires what Wordsworth, in his ode on immortality, calls "the philosophic mind." This message from Abrahams is, indeed, what Spender meant by "the politics of the unpolitical," the message of a man who is not imprisoned by one of the world's political creeds. It is evident in all of Abrahams's fiction, and it is emphasised in his historical novels; and, because of it, we should treat with caution what seems to be an advocacy by Abrahams, in the closing pages of Coyaba, for group solidarity and withdrawal. In a discussion on black history and the future of black people, David Brown tells his wife that black people must collectively "withdraw from all this [the western life-style] as fully as is humanly possible...in order to free ourselves from that long occupation of our minds" (Coyaba, p. 435). However, it is possible to see, in these very pages, that the group solidarity and withdrawal suggested here have nothing to do with Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa philosophy. David Brown qualifies his suggestion of withdrawal thus: "It is not being against anything or anybody; it is not anti-Westernism, not anti-Capitalist or anti-Marxist" (Coyaba, p. 435). The suggested withdrawal is a withdrawal from a certain destructive westernism; just as Abrahams's rejection of destructive African tribal practices does not suggest anti-Africanism, so his call for a withdrawal from some western ways does not suggest anti-westernism. The call for withdrawal is an expression of Abrahams's concern about the extent of the mental colonisation of black people. David Brown explains: "Those who have gone through it [withdrawal] will know when they are their own people and their minds are their own, no longer colonies of other minds. One of the most terrible things about the Westernism from which we must withdraw to find ourselves is its loss of faith and direction, of the capacity to know, instinctively, the true imperatives for historical survival" (Coyaba, p. 437). However, the fact that Abrahams's call for withdrawal is a virtuous act does not save it from being an emotional formulation without any solidity in the practical world. How does Abrahams suppose that black people all over the world are going to undergo this spiritual withdrawal? Moreover, given Abrahams's preoccupation with the theme of withdrawal in the last pages of Coyaba, one may ask the following question: was Abrahams practising withdrawal in the period between 1966 and 1985 when nobody seems to have heard from him, when he produced nothing? If he was, then he must know that even well-intentioned withdrawal can cause the most excruciating psychological paralysis for some (perhaps most) people, and the most frustrating artistic debility for the aesthete.

The creative writer who utilises history must therefore, in his own life, be wary of excessive withdrawal or even sheer moodiness. Withdrawal, which is by definition a form of retreat, can easily become opposed to history which, for ill or good, always marches forward. Withdrawal can cause the uncomfortable situation in which, in A Night of Their Own, Karl Van As and Mildred Scott find themselves trapped, the situation in which "time past, time present, time future merged into a static moment of endless ritual" (A Night, p. 170). Art, by contrast, is a most natural handmaiden of history. Here is Tolstoy on the relationship between art and history: "...art renders accessible to men of the latest generations all the feelings experienced by their predecessors, and those also which are being felt by their best and foremost contemporaries. And as the evolution of knowledge proceeds by truer and more necessary knowledge,... so the evolution of feeling proceeds through art...." [20] This art demands the highest imagination. With it, Abrahams has been able to present in dramatic context an Arawak's helplessness in sixteenth-century Jamaica, pioneer life in two slave communities in nineteenth-century Jamaica, the agony of a trekking Boer and the dilemma of an old Matabele king in nineteenth-century South Africa, violent racism in the American south of the early part of this century, and many cries of suffering and rebellion in colonial and independent Africa. If art has served Abrahams well in his utilisation and interpretation of history, it has also served him effectively in his account of the first twenty years of his life. This latter, Abrahams's autobiography, is the subject of the next and final chapter.

Notes

[1] Peter Abrahams, *A Night of Their Own* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 237. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[2] George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant," in *An Age Like This*, Vol. I of *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (1968; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979), p. 269.

[3] Alan Paton, "The Challenge of Fear," in *The Essayist*, ed. Sheridan Baker, 3rd ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Harper and Row; Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., 1977), p. 380.

[4] Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 69.

[5] Mphahlele, p. 70.

[6] Dan Jacobson, "Riot in Kimberley," in *Time of Arrival and Other Essays* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962), p. 98.

[7] Nunasu Amosu, rev. of *A Night of Their Own*, by Peter Abrahams, *Black Orpheus*, No. 22, Aug. 1967, p. 59.

[8] Oliver Tambo, Introd., *No Easy Walk to Freedom: Articles, Speeches and Trial Addresses of Nelson Mandela*, ed. Ruth First (1965; rpt. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1982), p. xiii.

[9] William Butler Yeats, "Easter 1916," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams and others (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1962), II, 1353.

[10] Michael Wade, *Peter Abrahams* (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1972), p. 173.

[11] Wilfred Cartey, *Whispers from a Continent: The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1969), p. 188.

[12] Peter Abrahams, *This Island Now* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 95-96. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[13] W.H. Auden, "Look, Stranger," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams and others (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1962), II, 1618.

[14] Georg Buchner, *Danton's Death*, I.v., trans. James Maxwell (London: Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1968), p. 32.

[15] Peter Abrahams, The View from Coyaba (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), pp. 321-322. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[16] Friedrich Engels, The Peasant War in Germany (London: n.p., 1927), pp. 135-6, as quoted in Basil Davidson, Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 216.

[17] Peter Abrahams, "We Can Learn to Be Color-Blind," The New York Times Magazine, 11 April 1965, p. 38.

[18] Matthew Arnold, "Shakespeare," in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. M.H. Abrams and others (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1962), II, 879 and 880.

[19] Stephen Spender, as quoted in Carl E. Schorske, "Artist of Angst," rev. of Oskar Kokoschka, 1886-1890, Exhibitions at the Tate Gallery, London, June-Aug. 1986, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Dec. 1986-Mar. 1987, The New York Review of Books, 15 Jan. 1987, pp. 21-22.

[20] Tolstoy, p. 143.

V. 'The Need to Write, to Tell Freedom': The Literariness of an Autobiography

Tell Freedom, Abrahams's autobiography, was published in 1954, and it is truly an unforgettable narrative, unquestionably Abrahams's most successful work of art. To say this is to hint at a flaw in conventional literary criticism in which poetry, drama and the novel have become synonymous with art, and in which the most hackneyed popular romance is considered more worthy of rigorous literary analysis than is autobiography. No doubt, this traditional attitude--whose reformation is now well on the way--is attributable to the mistaken view that the autobiographer does no more than record actuality, that he lacks the flexibility and inventiveness of the novelist, that he has an obligation to facts as they were and as they happened in his past. Tell Freedom helps to make the case that the writing of autobiography can be a full-time literary activity; in the long writing career of Peter Abrahams, it is the only book in which manner is hardly ever unworthy of matter, in which technique almost never fails to reinforce subject.

Ali Mazrui has honorifically called Kwame Nkrumah's autobiography "a political classic in African autobiographical exercises,"[1] and it is strange that an impressive, all-round commentator of the stature of Mazrui should have made this remark. Even a political document, especially an autobiographical one, if it is to be a "classic," must also be a work of art. Nkrumah's autobiography is an example of what Roger Porter and H.R. Wolf, in their book The Voice Within, label "celebrity autobiography."[2] It proceeds chronologically from Chapter i to Chapter xxv, and we read it for Nkrumah's sensational accounts of his "Hard Times" in America, his "Arrest and Detention" in the Gold Coast, his launching of "Positive Action," his skill in "Tactical Action," and his "Hour of Triumph."[3] It is very much like a textbook of history, written in a pseudo-grand style, and completely lacking in images of "solid objects and scraps of useless information" which, as Orwell has pointed out, are inevitable presences in a prose work of art.[4] We do not read Nkrumah's autobiography for an aesthetic experience or for an insight into the artistic imagination of the autobiographer. It is hard, then, to find the justification for calling this autobiography a classic even if Nkrumah himself is now regarded as a classic African statesman.

The other kind of autobiography is "literary autobiography," and it is in this category that Tell Freedom belongs. Literary autobiography calls attention to itself as a work of art, and the finest illustration of this fact is, perhaps, Saint Augustine's Confessions. In Book IX, Chapter iv of Confessions, we do not merely sense that Saint Augustine is about to conclude the narrative part of his autobiography in order to devote himself, in the last four books, to his meditative discourse on Genesis; we actually read these words: "But time could never suffice for me to set down on paper all the great blessings which you bestowed upon me, particularly at that time, since I must hurry on to tell of greater things."[5] Greater things are about to be told--this is Augustine's message. How can the reader, at the mercy of such rhetorical manipulation, help being anxious to turn another page? In the first two chapters of Book XI, we see fascinating examples of the reflexivity of autobiographical prose, of a work calling attention to its own processes. "Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty," Augustine recites Psalm 144:3, and then states affectionately, "I have said before, and I shall say again, that I write this book for love of your love." He explains that his autobiography is a labour of devotion, "To the best of my power and the best of my will I have laid this long account before you...," and then he recites Psalm 117:1, "For you are gracious, your mercy endures for ever."[6] Even if Augustine had not made copious use of quotations from the Bible, it would still have been obvious that Confessions is written in the form of a prayer. But, by incorporating borrowings from the scriptures into almost every other sentence of the book, the autobiographer underlines the fact that he is using the Biblical prose style and that, in his very language, form and content are harmonised.

If Saint Augustine's purely Christian autobiography, written at the close of the fourth century, draws attention to the processes of its composition, so do some far less explicitly Christian and far more political autobiographies of twentieth-century South Africa illuminate their own textual processes. In Towards the Mountain, in explaining why his teaching days at Ixopo High School were "unforgettable," Alan Paton says, "I fell in love," and then proceeds to remark in parenthesis, not in a footnote, but in the body of the text:

> I have come to a halt here. The reason is that I have already told this story in KONTAKION For You Departed..., but I realise that part of it must be told again, because For You Departed was written after Dorrie's [Paton's wife's] death, under the influence of deep emotions that I do not feel now.... It must be in a way written anew, and that won't be easy. I am writing this parenthetical note in the hope that the mere writing will remove the difficulties--of literary craft rather than emotion--in the way of retelling the story.[7]

In similar--albeit less detailed--manner, Ezekiel Mphahlele, in Down Second Avenue, says:

> As soon as I landed in Nigeria in September 1957 and settled into school work, I wrote and finished the second half of this book [Down Second Avenue]. Immediately I felt the difference between writing here and in a South African climate. Somehow it feels like having just climbed down from a vehicle that has been rocking violently for countless miles.[8]

The point Paton and Mphahlele impress upon us is that the way we learn of what they tell us is as important as what they tell us. Paton warns us that his two accounts of his love affair with Dorrie are bound to be different because the first is written "under the influence of deep emotions" caused by the recent death of Dorrie, while the second, in Towards the Mountain, is free of these emotions. Mphahlele too addresses the issue of the relationship between emotion and writing, but he is concerned with emotion that is, unlike Paton's, essentially public; it is emotion that afflicts all black writers who practise their craft under the oppressive burden of apartheid.

In Tell Freedom, Abrahams also thematises the writing process, but he does it more indirectly than Mphahlele or Paton or the distant Saint Augustine. The title, "Tell Freedom," is as instructive as it is simple. In a prudently positioned passage on the very last page of the narrative, in exceptionally moving and memorable prose, the autobiographer places his title in context: "Perhaps life had a meaning that transcended race and colour. If it had, I could not find it in South Africa. Also, there was the need to write, to tell freedom, and for this I needed to be personally free...."[9] Clearly it is not to a dry, sociological writing about freedom that Abrahams considers his personal freedom indispensable; even in the hellish atmosphere of South Africa, a psychologically atrophied person can still engage in that kind of writing. Abrahams's psychological need, his need "to be personally free," is indispensable to his work of "telling freedom" because, in this work, Abrahams is as concerned with how he "tells" freedom as with the message of freedom itself. The word "tell" is meant to alert the reader to the artistic dimensions of the autobiography, to the fact that the narrative has affinities with a tale, and to the fact that freedom is a raw material which Abrahams has, in his autobiography, refined into a durable ornament. The use of fictional techniques to propagate a message is, after all, what the young Abrahams's father seems to encourage when, on the opening page of Tell Freedom, he says: "Come, Lee. Tell us what you see and we'll make it into a story" (Tell Freedom, p. 3). It is also what the old preacher of the Cape Flats, a character in Tell Freedom, had advised. He had told Abrahams: "Remember the story you made up for the children at Christmas? Well, the children and many of us grown-ups still remember it. If you make stories like that for the white people of England, they will listen and you can tell them about us" (Tell Freedom, p. 356). The old man is astute. He knows that you have to captivate your audience if you want it to be well disposed to your message, and he advises Abrahams to use aspects of the story to do this. What better man than a preacher to offer such advice! When Abrahams wrote Tell Freedom, he wrote it the way stories are made.

That literary autobiographers want their readers to appreciate them as artists is also evident in the fact that these writers never forget to advertise themselves as voracious readers of great literature. It is inconceivable that anyone can read Confessions without worshipfully admiring Saint Augustine's legitimately advertised biblicism. The saint also mentions the help he got from the "books of the platonists" in his efforts to understand the problem of evil, and the love for philosophy that Cicero's Hortensius kindled in him.[10] William Wordsworth gave the title, "Books" to Book V of his fine autobiographical poem, "The Prelude," in which he speaks lyrically of having perused, in his youth, "The famous history of the errant knight / Recorded by Cervantes," and of having found "knowledge" and "enduring joy" in "works / Of mighty Poets."[11] But, in Biographia Literaria, Coleridge outdoes Wordsworth. With a little help from "a very sensible, though at the same time a very severe master," young Coleridge made the acquaintance of--indeed, got to know very well--Demosthenes, Cicero, Homer, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid, Lucretius, and a host of other ancients who, no doubt, leave the twentieth-century reader awe-stricken.[12]

Present-day African autobiographers do not inspire nearly as much awe, but they advertise their addiction to reading just as earnestly. In Ake, the young Wole Soyinka does not name books, but he boastfully tells us that he once left "Essay [his father] astonished at my appetite for books, yet even he did not know how deeply I had burrowed into his bookcase."[13] Alan Paton's case is interesting. He says: "Of Yeats we knew nothing....Nor did we know anything of T.S. Eliot...."[14] But, one wonders, why make this confession? Is it, perhaps, to tell us that the twenty-one year old Alan may not have known Yeats and Eliot, but the seventy-seven year old autobiographer clearly does?

In any case, Paton does not forgo all opportunites for blatant self-advertisement. "Speaking for myself," he announces, "I had now read widely, or was soon to read widely, in Dickens and Thackeray, Shakespeare and Milton and Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, Tennyson and Browning."[15] Soon after he continues: "We read the war poets, Wilfred Owen, Wilfred Gibson, Julian Grenfell, and of course Rupert Brooke....We were devoted to A.E. Housman...." He even adds: "Indeed, I cannot remember all that we read."[16] Mphahlele, when he was in Standard Three, "used to pick up any piece of printed paper to read, whatever it was. It became a mania with me. I couldn't let printed matter pass.... I read, and read, till it hurt."[17] Like Wordsworth, Mphahlele also made the acquaintance of Cervantes's knight errant, for when Mphahlele was nineteen and had just graduated into Standard Six, he "stumbled on a tattered copy of Don Quixote--an old translation." "I must have read it three times," he says, "The leaves fell out in the process."[18]

In Tell Freedom, Abrahams too performs these exercises in what might seem to be self-laudation. When he is eleven years old and is working at a smithy, he meets a short-sighted Jewish girl who, after inviting him to sit beside her, "...turned the pages of the book in front of her. She looked at me, then began to read from Lamb's Tales from Shakespear. The story of Othello jumped at me and invaded my heart and mind..." (Tell Freedom, p. 172). Soon, after attending school regularly for three years, Abrahams learns to read and write. He tells us: "Lamb's Tales from Shakespear was my favourite reading matter. I stole, by finding, Palgrave's Golden Treasury. These two books, and the Everyman edition of John Keats, were my proudest and dearest possessions, my greatest wealth" (Tell Freedom, p. 189). Later, when he is about fifteen years old, Abrahams goes to the Bantu Men's Social Centre on the outskirts of Johannesburg for a job interview. It is here, as he waits in a spacious room for his interview, that he first sees the writings of black Americans: "I moved over to the bookshelves. I wanted to touch the books, but held back. Perhaps it was not permitted. Typed slips showed what each shelf held: novels, history, sociology, travel, Africana, political science, American Negro Literature.... I stopped there. American Negro Literature" (Tell Freedom, p. 224). He finds out that the bookshelves are not prohibited territory:

> I reached up and took out a fat black book. The Souls of Black Folk, by W.E.B. DuBois. I turned the pages....

> I replaced the book and reached for others. There was Up from Slavery; Along this Way, by Weldon Johnson; a slim volume called The Black Christ; a fat volume called The New Negro....
>
> I took the New Negro to a chair. I turned the pages. (Tell Freedom, pp.224-226)

After his interview, Abrahams goes down to the library in the Bantu Men's Social Centre and discovers such black American literary giants as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Stirling Brown, Claude McKay, and Georgia Douglas Johnson. "In the months that followed," he says, "I spent nearly all my spare time in the library of the Bantu Men's Social Centre. I read every one of the books on the shelf marked: American Negro Literature" (Tell Freedom, pp. 229-230).

Such, then, is the exhibitionism of literary autobiographers (only a few of whom have been mentioned in this chapter) when it comes to the matter of their interest in literature and their addiction to reading. This exhibitionism can be sheer self-indulgence, but it is also a signal to readers that these writers are artistic souls who could not do the work of writing autobiography if it were not also an aesthetic enterprise. However, whereas Wordsworth, Coleridge, Soyinka, Paton, and Mphahlele simply advertise their propensity for reading, Abrahams's reading in Tell Freedom, like Saint Augustine's in Confessions, has considerable formal significance. "With Shakespeare and poetry," Abrahams declares, "a new world was born....I lived in two worlds, the world of Vrededorp and the world of these books" (Tell Freedom, p. 189). The books referred to here, in Chapter i of Book II, are from the sixteenth century (Othello) and the nineteenth century (Lamb's Tales, Keats's poetry, Palgrave's Golden Treasury). These books must have instilled in the young Abrahams a sense of the eternal truths about the human condition, and they certainly fed the artist in him; in his own words, "They [the books] fed the familiar craving hunger that awaits the sensitive young and poor when the moment of awareness comes" (Tell Freedom, p. 189). However, these books, which are all by white men, could not and did not appeal to his sense of racial pride and, with the exception of, Othello, did not depict societies which mirrored his own. This is why Abrahams "lived in two worlds, the world of Vrededorp and the world of these books." Different from this first set of books is the collection that Abrahams happened upon at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. The books in this collection, mentioned in Chapter V of Book II, are twentieth-century literature, they are all by native and naturalised black

Americans, and their inevitable theme is the racism which is such a crippling reality for Abrahams. Of Du Bois's The Souls of Black Folk, for instance, Abrahams says:

> For all the thousands of miles, for all the ocean, between the land and people of whom he wrote and my land, Du Bois might have been writing about my land and people. The mood and the feeling he described were native to me. I recognized the people as those among whom I lived.... Du Bois had given me a key to the understanding of my world.... (Tell Freedom, p. 226)

In Shakespeare and English poetry, then, the young Abrahams feels the hypnotic power of art, while in the writings of black America he feels a strong sense of identity. He explains to us: "My mind was divided.... The call of Harlem, Negro Colleges, and the "New Negro" writers, was compelling. But Charles Lamb, John Keats, Shelley, and the glorious host they led made a counter call. And my mind's eye saw a peaceful land that offered peace to a poet" (Tell Freedom, p. 233). For the young Peter, mental conflict is inescapable, and it is out of this conflict that the adult autobiographer designs a structural polarity, an organising framework, which encloses much of the action in Tell Freedom.

In Tell Freedom, the artistic temperament and the debilitating political reality of South Africa are locked in mortal combat; one must triumph over the other. Like his idol John Keats, Abrahams sees the act of dreaming as an expression of the delightful yearnings of the romantic artist. The opening paragraph of Tell Freedom is a presentation of a dream world:

> I pushed my nose and lips against the pane and tried to lick a raindrop sliding down on the other side. As it slid past my eyes, I saw the many colours in the raindrop.... It must be warm in there. The green must be the trees and the grass; and the brightness, the sun.... I was inside the raindrop, away from the misery of the cold damp room. I was in a place of warmth and sunshine, inside my raindrop world. (Tell Freedom, p. 3)

The "cold damp room" is apartheid South Africa in microcosm; the raindrop world, the invented world, signifies escape through art. In similar manner did Keats, about a century earlier, in a flight of fancy, escape on the wings of a nightingale. "To dream in the middle of the nightmare," comments an insightful critic, is "an artistic necessity."[19] But, in Abrahams's troubled land, dreaming is a luxury that is soon terminated, even by those who mean well. Abrahams's father needs only one word to call his son back to the real world; so thin are the walls of the dream world. The father calls out, "Lee," and his son is beamed back to a world where, like Keats's, indeed more than Keats's, "men sit and hear each other groan..., / Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin, and dies; /

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow...."[20]

The conflict between the dreamy artistic lad and his environment is again evident when Abrahams, his half-sister Maggie, and his half-brother's girl-friend go to visit his half-brother at Diepkloof reformatory. The brutality of the white guards and the sight of his labouring brother prove too much for Abrahams; he turns his eyes skyward and temporarily escapes from the scene through dream vision:

> The afternoon sun slanted westward, but only slightly. A long eagle circled overhead. Once it spread its great wings and swooped low, no doubt to see what manner of men these striped beings [the prisoners] were. Then, with movements of great power and grace, it climbed. It made an almost straight line up. I watched it grow smaller, hazy, and then merge into the blue sky, which had suddenly grown infinitely far removed from the world of men below. I longed to be like that eagle, able to fly right out of the range of this place, so that I would not have to watch my brother breaking rock under the hot sun. (Tell Freedom, pp. 155-156)

Unlike Keats, Abrahams has no excuse to wonder, "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?... / Do I wake or sleep?"[21] He knows fully well that he has been dreaming, that the dreaming is over, and that he is now very much awake. He can hear the sound of Harry's pickaxe as it strikes the hard rock.

However, the artist in the young Peter refuses to be stone-crushed by what Wilfred Cartey calls "the claustrophobic actuality of South Africa."[22] Like Wordsworth's, Peter's soul has a "plastic power," and it remains unsubdued "by the regular action of the world."[23] He continues to dream until one day, in exalted reverie, he falls over a working black man who snaps at him "What with you! You blind or drunk?" (Tell Freedom, p. 203) Peter may well have replied that, like Keats, he is known to enjoy a "draught of vintage...that hath been / Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth" and which, when gulped down, enabled a miserable poet to "leave the world unseen."[24] He does not do this; he apologises to the janitor: "Sorry, mister. I was thinking" (Tell Freedom, p. 203). Thereupon, Jim the janitor proceeds to explain what he considers to be the problem with the young Peter Abrahams:

> You think with your eyes, boy?... No. I know what it is. It is not thinking. It is dreaming. It is a thing all boys do. In your mind you were not in this place. You were in another place.... But you must not call it thinking, it is dreaming. Sometimes a man thinks and does not see. But he stops before he falls. The man who dreams only wakes after he has fallen. (Tell Freedom, p. 203)

Jim's warning is clear. This is not Romantic England where a child-poet once enjoyed "The glory and the freshness of a dream" and to whom everything seemed "Appareled in celestial light."[25] When Abrahams read the Romantics, his "mind's eye saw a peaceful land that offered peace to a poet" (Tell Freedom, p. 233). But it is one thing to have read Wordsworth and Keats and Shelley, quite another to indulge in their luxuries. In South Africa, a Coloured boy's dreaming and imagining are not advisable; his unconscious expression of his literary self is potentially harmful to himself. South Africa is no country for non-whites with aspirations. The trade unionist Max Gordon tells Abrahams:

> Don't be a bloody fool. You know and I know, that there's no room for you here. Who wants a writer? The whites? Sure, if you'll be a performing monkey and tell them how happy you are with your lot. The blacks? They've no time for reading. Most of them can't read. You could become a propagandist, but you are too much of a bloody artist for that.... So what's left? Nothing. Nobody wants you, or, at least, even those who do don't know it. Who's going to buy what you write and give you a chance to eat? (Tell Freedom, pp. 312-313)

South Africa can accomodate a man like Jim who has accepted, even if he is not content with, his eternal station as janitor, but it is apprehensive about a Coloured boy who, while serving a kind white woman, has the audacity to say to her, "I'm not always going to carry in the market, missus" (Tell Freedom, p. 200).

With a poetic soul that yearns to sing, Abrahams turns away from Marxism because this creed does not "take in human feeling, love and laughter, poetry and music..." (Tell Freedom, p. 298). Not even sex is exempt from artistic considerations. It is from a Harlem Renaissance poem that Abrahams seeks guidance for his first attempt at touching a girl's body. "The poem had mentioned breasts," he says, "I reached for her left breast. She stiffened, then relaxed immediately" (Tell Freedom, p. 245). Later, a slightly older Abrahams rises from his first sexual intercourse a sad man because "It should have been different, an act of love and dedication, an act of beauty" (Tell Freedom, p. 299). To this young man about to be initiated into the world of sex, the distinction between art and life is artificial. In the end, determined that he will not suffer the fate of men like his brother Harry who have lost their gaiety and their youthful ambitions, or the fate of men like Jim who see no alternatives to slave labour, Abrahams leaves South Africa. He states at the end of his autobiography:

> For me, personally, life in South Africa had come to an end. I had been lucky in some of the whites I had met. Meeting them had made a straight "all-blacks-are-good, all-whites-are-bad" attitude impossible. But I had reached a point where the gestures of even my friends among the whites were suspect, so I had to go or be for ever lost. I needed, not friends, not gestures, but my manhood. And the need was desperate. (Tell Freedom, p.370)

Into these words, Abrahams seems to have poured all his soul, all his feeling. For years to come, the passage will be lingered over for its beautiful cadence as well as its moving delineation of the mind of a sensitive Coloured man. Abrahams has reached a point in his life where he desires not charity, not friendly gestures, nothing short of the acceptance of his equal humanity. So he leaves South Africa to tell his story to the world.

Wilfred Cartey, an admirer of Abrahams's writings, has commented that "...any flight by black writers creates another paradox since it is their intelligence and vision which must be called upon to carve freedom for their people."[26] True, but writers express their intelligence and vision best in the creative realm, not in the overheated corridors of politics; and South Africa denies them the mental calm without which they are unable to write well. Wherever black writers may be, their works can be read by those who seek insight from them. Today, Abrahams has been in voluntary exile for many years, but nothing stops Oliver Tambo, the current president of the African National Congress, from seeking guidance from *A Wreath for Udomo*, *This Island Now*, and *Tell Freedom*. It is lucky for the world that, in his twenty-year battle against *apartheid*, dreamy Peter survives to depart from South Africa with his writer's imagination intact. "I walked briskly to the docks," he concludes *Tell Freedom*, "And all my dreams walked with me" (*Tell Freedom*, p. 370).

It is clear, then, that much of the action in *Tell Freedom* is about the conflict between poetic sensibility and *apartheid*. It is also clear that this conflict is not only theme, but also form, the autobiography's organising framework. However, it is form not in a neoclassical sense but, as is to be expected with Abrahams, in a Romantic sense, in a specifically Coleridgean sense. The neoclassicals preached and practised what Coleridge called "mechanic form," the structure created "when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material...." The form which Abrahams has designed out of the tension between literary disposition and grim political reality is an example of what Coleridge described as "organic form," the structure which is "innate," which "shapes as it develops itself from within...."[27] Within this structural polarity is dramatised not only the conflict between poetic sensibility and *apartheid*, but also the defeat, in the battle for Abrahams, of black

America's protest literature by the "purer" art of England's Romantics. It is a strong pull that the black American writers exert on the young Abrahams. Langston Hughes says:

> I'm looking for a house
> In the world
> Where the white shadows
> Will not fall....
> There is no such house,
> Dark brother,
> No such house
> At all.
> (Tell Freedom, p. 229)

Naturally, Abrahams is moved by lines which make such simple poetry of his own longings and fears. He is impressed by Stirling Brown who, he says, "wrote with the authority of a man who had had a long talk with history," by Claude McKay who "stirred" him "to aggressive pride," by Georgia Douglas Johnson who "stirred" him "to pride in the darkness of" his mother and sister, and by Jean Toomer who "stirred" him "to the verge of tears" (Tell Freedom, pp. 229-230). Abrahams becomes "...a colour nationalist, through the writings of men and women who lived a world away from me" (Tell Freedom, p. 230). He now attends meetings where Harlem is romanticised and glorified as "...the city of Negroes. A city within a city: not a suburb, not a location, not a slum area, a city..." (Tell Freedom, p. 232). His imagination goes wild and transforms Harlem into a paradise for protest writers: "A Negro city! Imagine Countee Cullen walking down a street and meeting Langston Hughes! And then imagine Paul Robeson joining them! And Du Bois! And Stirling Brown....And let them talk! Imagine..." (Tell Freedom, p. 234).

However, in spite of the powerful attractiveness of black America, it is England which wins this rather amicable battle for Abrahams. With the black American writers, Abrahams feels a strong sense of racial oneness, and from them he derives inspiration and hope; but he regards England's Romantics as his natural forerunners and himself as their kindred spirit. It is of no import that he is Coloured and they are white, and that he is a world and a century away from them; he and the Romantics are still seeds of the same species. Here are the autobiographer's own words:

> ...it seemed that America had more to offer me as a black man. If the American Negro was not free, he was, at least, free to give voice to his unfreedom. And there was promise for me in the very fact that so many of them had risen to high eminence.
>
> Yet England, holding out no offer, not even the comfort of being among my own kind, could counter that call because men now dead had once crossed its heaths and walked its lanes, quietly, unhurriedly, and had sung with such beauty that their songs had pierced the heart of a black boy, a

> world away, and in another time. (*Tell Freedom*, pp. 233-234)

Therefore, Abrahams decides: "Perhaps I would go to America afterwards, but I would go to England first" (*Tell Freedom*, p. 234). He is, in effect, saying that he is a writer first and a political writer second. Had his circumstances been different, had he lived in a peaceful, unpolitical age, he might have contented himself with celebrating the loveliness of the earth, and depicting a world in which men and women walked Edenic lanes. By nature, he is not a protest writer; he has been forced by *apartheid* into becoming one. By nature, he is an uncompromising Romantic, a spontaneous follower of Keats and all his tribe. "I would go there [England]," he says, "because the dead men who called were, for me, more alive than the most vitally living" (*Tell Freedom*, p. 234). The appeal of black America is powerful, but the call of England is irresistible because it is spiritual, otherworldly. "In my heart," says Abrahams, "I knew my going there [England] would be in the nature of a pilgrimage" (*Tell Freedom*, p. 234).

Clearly, then, literary autobiographers engage in a sort of public relations in which they diligently acquaint us with their enviable reading in order to alert us to the literariness of their works. However, as has been shown to be the case in *Tell Freedom*, autobiographers can go beyond self-advertisement to exploit the formal potentialities of this laborious exhibition of their reading. But the very fact that they do these two things means that their accounts are destined to be highly selective, shaped according to the ends which they have in view. This does not mean that theirs is an easy task in the performance of which they can afford to be capricious; for no autobiographer can possibly narrate in his work all the things about his life that he would like to select. Saint Augustine, in *Confessions*, cries out in frustration to his God: "But if my pen is my spokesman, when shall I be able to tell of all the means you used to make of me a preacher of your word.... When shall I be able to tell how you urged me, how you filled me with fear, how you consoled and guided me?"[21] He invites God to become his co-writer and help him with the work of selecting material: "Let me offer you in sacrifice the service of my thoughts and tongue, but first give me what I may offer to you." He begs his Creator to grant him the gift of economical writing and to save him from the creative sins of dishonesty and unsanctioned exaggeration: "Circumcise the lips of my mind and my mouth. Purify them of all rash speech and falsehood."[22]

In The Prelude, we know that Wordsworth is faced with the problem of selecting material because he employs such phrases as "Nor should this, perchance, / Pass unrecorded...," "But let this / Be not forgotten...," and "...this only let me add...."[30] By emphasising what he is recording, Wordsworth is also, consciously or inadvertently, drawing our attention to the fact that there is much that he is regrettably omitting. This indirect method is employed freely and unashamedly by Alan Paton in Towards the Mountain where the phrase, "I must record" is often repeated. Here are instances of this phrase in the course of six chapters which have, for purposes of illustration, been chosen arbitrarily: "I must record an act of conceit and vanity," "I must record one extraordinary fact," "I must record that I did not try to change overnight the racial practices of South Africa," "I must record that magistrates were beginning to make greater and greater use of reformatories," "I must...record that I tried for a brief period an experiment of racial separation."[31] Paton uses the phrase at least once in every chapter, or once every ten pages or so. In fact, there is a page on which he uses the phrase twice: "One must also record that the diocese of Johannesburg received substantial financial support from some of the mining houses" and, three sentences later, "one must in honesty acknowledge that a bishop's commission in 1977 would produce a report not very different from that of 1943."[32] This imperative phrase is effective in pointing out that Paton is using material discriminatingly, for the phrase implies its opposite: "I must record this or that" implies that "I must not record this or that." However, Paton occasionally abandons this indirect method in favour of straightforward, unabashed declarations. In Chapter vi of his autobiography, he announces, "I do not intend in this book to give the complete story of my sexual life, but I shall not omit those things which are relevant to my total life."[33] The problem is that Paton does omit those things about his sexual life which are relevant to the drawing of a picture of his total life. Early in his narrative he reveals, to the reader's admiration of his candour, two instances of his boyhood homosexuality: "I entered one such relationship with C., who was in the same class as I.... Just how our conversation proceeded I cannot remember, but it ended up by my feeling his penis, the size and rigidity of which astonished me. My other homosexual experience had no element of affection, at least not for me...."[34] These are brave revelations in a world intolerant of unorthodoxy; but, once an autobiographer has summoned enough courage to make them, he must speak unwaveringly and not leave gaps in the record. In the long remainder of the narrative, Paton says no more about his homosexuality. He speaks without fail about his affection for young boys, but he does not say whether this affection is Platonic or sexual. Inevitably, he paints an unsatisfactory self-portrait before which the viewer wonders: is Mr. Paton a bisexual or was his homosexuality nothing more than adolescent experimentation?

In Tell Freedom, comments Kolawole Ogungbesan, "an incident is selected because it has contributed to the making of the artist...."[35] More than ten years before the publication of Tell Freedom, Abrahams had, in the pseudo-autobiographical preface to Dark Testament, hinted at his own selectivity. He had said in that preface, "I Remember," that the stories in Dark Testament "are taken from the everyday lives of some of the people I have known, whom I want to remember."[36] The important point lies in the relative clause, "whom I want to remember," which implies that the autobiographer has left out whatever material he does not consider central to his self-portrait. In Tell Freedom, little Peter's immediate sentimental attachment to a stray kitten, young Peter's many fantasies of escape, his refusal to be imprisoned in a political creed, his determination not to languish forever in his anomic environment, and his insatiable interest in Romantic literature are all incidents which have been selected for dramatisation because they help to project Abrahams's image of himself as a sensitive artist who cannot live without his personal freedom. It is with admirable autobiographical skill that Abrahams closes Book II of Tell Freedom. Peter has just taken and passed the standard-two exam, and he receives, as a prize for an essay he has written, a book of Keats's poetry. He shows his prize to his schoolmistress who says, "But you can't read this yet," to which Peter replies, "...I couldn't read Lamb's Tales once..." (Tell Freedom, p. 187). Peter asks his schoolmistress to read the Everyman text to him, and she says, "Here it is: 'Everyman, I will go with thee and be thy guide in thy most need to go by thy side'" (Tell Freedom, p. 186). One cannot help being overwhelmed by the feeling that Peter is destined to be some kind of literary man one day. Incidents like this, explains Ogungbesan, are "recorded in such a fashion as to invest the most mundane words and occasions with the most far-reaching import."[37] The schoolmistress's last words to her pupil, which are also the last words of Book II, are "Run along, Peter" (Tell Freedom, p. 186). This, as Ogungbesan observes, is "A casual remark, almost a school slang, but Abrahams builds it into something of moment; and he sprints along the road of destiny--with a little help from his friends."[38]

There is a sense, then, in which literary autobiography is a record not only of events but also of the recording mind. If Abrahams had not grown up to be a successful writer, would he have selected and dramatised the particular incidents which fill the pages of his autobiography? The insight of two theorists of autobiography is apposite here:

> If a man of sixty describes an experience which took place when he was twenty, he will describe it through the eyes of the older man. He may try to imagine himself at the younger age, but this is never totally possible. He will write about that experience with forty years' intervening knowledge of how it fit into his life; in addition, he will probably show how that particular experience influenced what he has become. [39]

In Tell Freedom, Abrahams is a man of thirty-five describing experiences which occurred in his life between his twentieth year and what may be called his pre-autobiographical childhood (that period of early childhood whose clear recollection is virtually impossible, and the events of which, in Abrahams's case, are built "out of hearsay and afterknowledge" [Tell Freedom, p. 4]). He is, at this time, an accomplished author with four novels, one book of short stories, and a work of reportage to his credit. He is a man of thirty-five who is not only describing but also selecting his experiences with fifteen years intervening knowledge of how they fit into his life; the events he has chosen to describe are those which point the way to what he has become. Does the autobiographer's selectivity imply, then, that he presents a falsified picture of himself? Not automatically, except to the reader blinkered by the positivist attitude which regards autobiography as a mirror of objective truth. But the autobiographer's discriminating choice of material does suggest that the picture he presents of himself is very subjective. "Thus, although the author's present perspective determines the meaning of the past and might suggest at first a violation of honesty...," observe Porter and Wolf in their theoretical analysis, "we should realize that each chronicler must see his own past in highly personal terms and cannot escape this apparent insincerity."[40]

However, to say that the autobiographer's selective self-portrait is not necessarily false is not to say that the verification of truth claims in autobiography has no legitimacy. Good written fiction, like good cinema, lures us, our formidable wills notwithstanding, into a temporary suspension of disbelief, and thereby enables us to be transported to the fictional world about which we are informing ourselves; when we once lift our eyes from the book, or from the screen, we are recalled to reality, and disbelief re-enters our minds. Autobiography, by contrast, demands from us nothing short of a permanent suspension of disbelief, and it is this demand that empowers us to expect of autobiographers that, while they may fictionalise accounts, they do not tell outright lies. It seems legitimate, for instance, to wonder how, in Ake, the four-year-old Soyinka knows about slavery and peace missions to Hitler, why he is worried by the difference in meaning between "Proprietress" and "schoolmistress," and how he is able to follow an argument, between two adults, on the interpretation of a biblical scripture.[41] At about the same age, Abrahams, in Tell Freedom, does not interpret experiences which are above his young head. On one occasion, he steals coal and is injured, while he is fleeing, by a black policeman. In flight, Abrahams can only think of what will happen to him and what his reactions will be if he is caught: "I ran as hard as I could. Oh, God! The fence is so far away. Run, Lee, run. They'll lash the skin off your back at the reformatory. I'll never steal coal again, baas. Never again..." (Tell Freedom, p. 75). For a boy of about five, in a situation like this, such a mental response is fitting. Abrahams the autobiographer skillfully puts the mature, political interpretation of the situation in the mouth of an adult who challenges the policeman: "Come, you dog of the white man! We will show you where your manhood was lost!" (Tell Freedom, p. 76) As Michael Wade says, "The boy does not realize that he has been nipped by the pincers of colour: it is his rescuers, the women who save him, who place the incident in its political and moral context."[42] In Ake, the most important incidents in the life of the Soyinka who has just turned ten are not drawn from any such believable things as the young boy's life with his age mates; the most important events are hard-to-believe stories like the ten-year-old Soyinka's career as English teacher of a women's group, and his discussions with a seasoned adult conversationalist on such elevated topics like "...labour unrest, the formation of an association, some projected alliances as the war [Second World War] progressed, a new scientific invention...."[43] How justifiable is it, in short, to present an autobiography which discusses Yoruba superstition, Yoruba feminism, and Nigerian nationalism through the eyes of a narrator who is never older than eleven and a half? It is apparent untruths like these, not the distortion of facts in the service of a larger or adorned truth, that are objectionable in an autobiographer. To illustrate this point one may cite an incident from Saint Augustine's Confessions. In Book II, Chapter iv, Augustine tells of his participation, at age sixteen, in the robbing of a pear tree:

> There was a pear-tree near our vineyard, loaded with fruit that was attractive neither to look at nor to taste. Late one night a band of ruffians, myself included, went to shake down the fruit and carry it away, for we had continued our games out of doors until well after dark, as was our pernicious habit. We took away an enormous quantity of pears, not to eat them ourselves, but simply to throw them to the pigs. Perhaps we ate some of them, but our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden.[44]

Of this incident, a Times Literary Supplement reviewer has said: "...steeped in Genesis as he was, we might have expected Augustine to recount the stealing of apples. But as he actually stole pears, he describes stealing pears."[45] But Augustine should not be any less deserving of praise if he had not been such a stubborn fact-teller. What does it really matter whether he stole pears or apples or bananas? Besides, in Genesis, the fatal fruit is not called "apple." In fact, it is left nameless, its only mark of identification being the phrase, "fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden," or the phrase, "fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." However, had the fruit been called "apple" in the Bible, and Augustine, knowing this, had changed his "pears" to "apples," he would simply have fictionalised an inconsequential fact for literary or ornamental reasons; he would not have told an untruth.

It was Virginia Woolf who, in her essay on how we should read books, reminded us that "facts are an inferior form of fiction," and advocated "the purer truth of fiction."[46] The implication here is that Virginia Woolf prefers fiction to fact, not that she regards, as we often do, fiction and fact as opposites. In creative literature, fiction and fact are often complementary, symbiotic, fused. Now, it is indisputable that fiction is more obvious than fact in the novel, and fact is more glaring than fiction in autobiography; however, this difference between the novel and autobiography is one of degree, not one of kind. It is even possible for a work that was begun as a novel to be converted into a confessed autobiography; this is the story of Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue. In an interview with Bernth Lindfors, Mphahlele said: "It was really a novel that had been turning around in my mind which later became Down Second

Avenue. I decided to chuck the novel altogether and simply write an autobiography." On this statement, James Olney has commented in his book, Tell me Africa: "This decision did not, as Mphahlele clearly understood, mean binding himself, hand, foot, and creative imagination, to a chronological and insignificant series of events."[47] Mphahlele continued to make conscious use of fictional methods even after he had decided to turn Down Second Avenue into an autobiography: "I would write about my people and the events they were caught up in, and then literally come to a stop and try to think about what these things were doing to me, and found that I could not express it in the strict order of biography. So I decided on the method of the interlude."[48] The interlude is, of course, a much-used device in fifteenth century dramatic and festive entertainment. Abrahams may not have begun Tell Freedom as a novel, but, even more than Mphahlele's, his autobiography is a fine example of literary craft. The selective art of its writer, which we have already discussed, is one aspect of the fictionality of Tell Freedom; but there is a number of other factors which cement this autobiography's claims to creative literature.

In Tell Freedom, as in fiction, time does not always progress like clockwork. In Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue and Paton's Towards the Mountain, clock-time is also often absent. However, unlike Mphahlele who tells us about events "in January of 1934," in "1938," "towards the end of 1940," "in the autumn of 1943," and "on a June night in 1945,"[49] and unlike Paton whose pages are littered with dates, Abrahams rarely mentions dates in Tell Freedom, the most notable of the rarities being the all-important piece of information: "...early on the morning of March 19,1919, I was born" (Tell Freedom, p. 6). For the most part, Abrahams, in Tell Freedom, manipulates past and present and blurs the methodical movement of time. In the opening section of the first chapter, Abrahams dramatises his nature as a child and his first impressions of his parents before he recounts the story of his father's courtship of his mother; he also devotes more space to the dramatisation than to the recounting. Needless to say, his father's wooing of his mother precedes his own existence chronologically, but by reversing the calendar-time order of events Abrahams indicates that he has assumed the creator's responsibility for organising his own experience; by concentrating more on scenic evocation than on the dry narration of events past, he shows that he is more in the business of artistic creation than in that of history writing. At the beginning of the second section of the first chapter, we see young Peter, in the company of his aunt, leaving Vrededorp for Elsburg location, but it is not until the occasion of Peter's return to Vrededorp that the autobiographer tells us why Peter left his home location in the first place. The effect (Peter's trip to Elsburg) is presented before its precedent cause (the death of Peter's sister, Natalie, and the hospitalisation of Peter's mother). Such manipulation of chronology, with its attendant withholding of information, is an element of fiction that is seldom absent from the novelist's bag of devices; and it is used in Tell Freedom for the same purposes for which a novelist employs it, namely, to create suspense and to control the reader's response. When the autobiographer of Tell Freedom is not busy re-ordering the calender-time sequence of events, he is signalling the progression of time with indefinite time phrases like "The days passed," "The long summer days hung over Vrededorp," "One morning," and "The long summer days passed" (Tell Freedom, pp. 73, 74, 110, and 136). Uninterested in the dated factuality of the kind in which Paton's Towards the Mountain abounds, Abrahams reduces a number of childhood reminiscences to a compressed series of dateless, "flashes of memory": "I remember the family picnics on Sundays.... I remember going to Sunday school.... I remember the stirring music of the Salvation Army....I remember....I remember....I remember..." (Tell Freedom, p. 9). The date of any one of these events is not important , nor is it important, in this instance, to know which event occurred before which. The thing for which we ought to be thankful is the autobiographer's generosity in giving us, through well-depicted scenes and "flashes of memory," a good feel of his childhood days. As for chronology, what is it really? Even in the real world, is there any chronology occurring naturally? Have we not imposed on the world our own chronology through the making of calendars and clocks? If it were not for man-made narrative structures, how would we determine the starting points and the ends of historical accounts? In Tell Freedom, as is often the case in fiction, what we encounter first is not the earliest chronological event. It has to be this way for us to comprehend the autobiographer's singular perspective, for us to understand his statement of a personal truth. This is what James Olney means when, in an insightful chapter on autobiography theory, he says: "As the cosmologer is,... so will be his cosmology."[59]

One cannot, therefore, accept Abrahams's implication in Dark Testament that he has no regard for plot in a story. In the short story, "Three Little Girls," the narrator says: "I walked a little distance away and thought about three little girls, and said: 'I am going to write a story about them. A story without a plot. See, I can't make plots. I just want to write. Life has no plots. Things just happen. Everything.'"[51] Well, as the discussion in the preceding paragraphs shows, things do not "just happen" in Tell Freedom, and, although "life has no plots," good creative literature must have them. A close study of Aristotle's definition of plot reveals that plot is not, as is commonly supposed, the "story" or the "action" as such; plot is not thematic. Plot is technical, not a part of the "what" but a part of the "how." The plotting of incidents is, according to Aristotle, the proper organising of events (which are indispensable to the drama) to achieve the desired effect on the audience. "When a thing can be included or not included without making any noticeable difference," says the ancient Greek, "that thing is no part of the whole."[52] In Tell Freedom, it is Abrahams's competence in gathering his information up in parcels and delivering each indispensable parcel at the proper place that makes his autobiography such undeniable evidence of the technical nature of plot.

Abrahams the autobiographer, working with the well-known tools of the novelist's trade, sometimes surpasses Abrahams the novelist. To illustrate the superiority of the skill with which Abrahams creates dialogue in his reportage to that with which he handles dialogue in his "pure" fiction, Michael Wade compares the following two passages, the first from Return to Goli and the second from A Night of Their Own:

> After the mountains we relaxed. The passengers moved about and began to fraternize. The old gentleman in front of me, an ex-mayor of one of the big cities of South Africa, got into conversation with me. It went something like this: "Going to West Africa?"
> "No. South."
> "To the Union?"
> "Yes."
> "Why?"
> "For a visit and to do some writing."
> "Ah, you're a journalist. Only South Africa?"
> "Kenya too. And perhaps some of the other territories if there's time."....
> "Ah-ha," the second gentleman said. "What paper?"
> "The Observer," I said....
> "Well now, our people are not the same as you people are. They are still uncivilized and backward."
> "All of them?"
> "Yes."
> "Aren't there any educated ones?"
> "Yes, but it's not the same. You're different. Anyone can see you're a civilized man, and being civilized is not just book learning. All you people are

> different. Your people are more developed than ours are."
>
> "Anyway, there's no colour-bar in our part [Kenya]," said the second.
>
> I turned to the ex-mayor.
>
> "But I come from South Africa. I was born there, in Johannesburg."
>
> He looked startled, then refused to believe me.
>
> "No, you come from West Africa."
>
> "I was born in the Union. It's true, you know."
>
> "I don't believe it."
>
> The second said:
>
> "You don't speak or behave like anyone from South Africa--or East Africa for that matter."
>
> "Like a West African?" I asked.
>
> "Yes," he said. "Like an educated one who's been in England for a long time."
>
> "I have been in England for a long time. But I still come from South Africa."[53]

> A shadow flittered across the woman's face, a minor emotional convulsion; then the automatic, polite smile that he remembered from other awkward times showed on her face.
>
> "You've lost weight, Karl--but it suits you."
>
> "What do I say?"
>
> "Two years is a long time. I'm not surprised you find it awkward."
>
> "Please, Mildred."
>
> "All right! What am I supposed to do? Fall on your neck because you've condescended to come back? Or is it that you've become infected with what you profess to detest?"....
>
> "I wrote you, Mildred. I explained."
>
> "And explanations cancel all hurt! Explanations make the blind see and the halt walk and the crooked straight.....The fact was that you were not coming back and I adjusted myself to this fact. And now...."....
>
> He said: "Do you understand what I'm saying, Mildred?"
>
> "I'm trying to."
>
> "If you do, you'll understand why I wrote and why I'm here."
>
> "If not?"
>
> He shrugged and walked away from where she sat. "Then I might as well give in."
>
> "Give in?"
>
> "To the hate-mongers and the fear-mongers."[54]

"One need only contrast these two passages," observes Wade (who concedes that the dialogues in Goli can, on occasion, be quite bad), to prove the general point that "...in Return to Goli,...one finds a freshness, a quality of liveliness, an ingredient of humour, indeed of humanity, which is almost always absent from parallel situations in the novels."[55] However, it is in his autobiography, more than in the commissioned report, that Abrahams is at his most impresssive in the management of dialogue. Consider the following portion of a dialogue between the fifteen-year-old Abrahams and his new-found girlfriend, Anne. They have just emerged from Anne's house on the occasion of Peter's first visit to Anne's family; Anne speaks first:

> "Gran [Anne's Grandma] asked if you've ever had another girl. You said no. Only when you were little, at school."
>
> "Yes, that was Ellen."
>
> "Yes. You told us her name. Then Gran asked if you'd ever slept with a girl. That was when you shook terribly. But you said no. Gran said it would make it easier for us."

> "Why?"
> "Don't you know about these things?"
> "No"
> "Didn't anybody--your mother--ever tell you?"
> "No."
> "Oh, we know all about it. But then, girls must, so they know what they are doing."
> "But why did Gran say it was easier for us."
> "Because you are not as keen to do it as those who have."
> "And you've never done it?"
> "No. Boys tried to make me, but I didn't love them."
> "Will you do it with me?"....
> "Peter--"
> "Yes?"
> "I don't want to sleep with you and have a baby, because we are too young. But I've seen boys leave their girls because they got tired of waiting. If you get tired, don't go and sleep with other girls. Come and I'll let you. Gran will help."
> "I'll never get tired!"
> "I want you always."
> "I want you always, Anne."
> We had finished with sex. (Tell Freedom, pp. 245-247)

This representative dialogue is effective because its content is in accord with the autobiographical revelations thus far made about the character of the young Peter. We discover that Peter, in his mid-teens, knows nothing about sex; this ignorance, in an environment of licentious sexual habits, is consistent with Peter's romantic and sentimental nature. Peter's instantaneous affection for a girl who is also romantic, who must love to have sex, is in character; so is his willingness, untypical of the boys in his age group, to wait until he and Anne can make of sex a thing of beauty. Peter's romantic attitude to sex, as revealed in this conversation, is a prefiguration of his inability, later in the narrative, to enjoy casual sex with Jane in the residence of the communist couple, Harold and Cathy. Dialogue of this kind does not irritate the reader because it does not highlight the obvious; it reveals character and hints at matters to come. Abrahams is clearly in control here, for, just as the sentiments voiced by the two lovers begin to get too highly wrought for the good of the dialogue, he, with one stroke of his pen--"We had finished with sex"--ends the conversation, and summarises the other things that the lovers discuss in indirect discourse: "I told her of my work, my studies, my dreams.... We ate all the chocolate, drank all the ginger beer, talked till we tired of talking..." (Tell Freedom, pp. 247-248).

Almost completely absent from Abrahams's novels is evidence of the skill with which he handles dialogue in his autobiography. The dialogues in Song of the City, for instance, are often facile at best and, at worst, pointless. Here is an example which shows Dick Nduli and the worldly Daisy in conversation; but the example also shows--in the action immediately preceding the dialogue--that this first meeting with Daisy is highly improbable, that it would not have occurred if Abrahams had not crudely employed the deus ex machina:

> A heavy loneliness settled over him. He ached for something that he could not name. Something warm and soft....
>
> Then he looked up. He saw her. She stood quite still. Her breasts pushing forward....
> Her lips opened slowly:
> "You are unhappy....Why?"
> "I was thinking of home."
> "Been here long?"
> "Nearly a month....And you?"
> "Many years...."
> She had not finished. He waited. "I came here to help to pay the taxes."
> "And then?"
> "I stayed." She looked away....
> "What is your name?"
> "Nduli."
> "What do they call you here?"
> "Dick."
> "They call me Daisy."
> "Yes."....
> "Come, lonely one, do you want some tea?"
> "Yes."
> "Then come to my room....But you must behave yourself. If you don't I shall call my baas. He's an angry man. He will beat you."[56]

What mechanical deadness! Nduli gets his heart's desire as if by magic. He longs for "something warm and soft" and, in an instant, something "with breasts pushing forward" materialises before his very eyes in the person of Daisy! This incident is an ill-judged borrowing from Keats's unfinished epic, Hyperion, where Apollo dreams of the goddess Mnemosyne and wakes up to find her at his side. Keats is able to present this scene ex machina without harming his poem because the entire literary paraphernalia of Hyperion justifies the presentation. Hyperion, written in language that is often metaphysical, is about supernatural happenings, about ousted Titans and Titanesses fallen to earth, and it therefore has limitless room for the use of the deus ex machina; not so Song of the City, a realistic novelette about the most painfully real country on earth. It is disappointing, then, that the dialogue between Nduli and Daisy is nearly as unreal as their fairy-tale-like chance encounter. Their conversation is disagreeable to the ear because it is most unnatural. Abrahams is not in control here: the utterances of Nduli and Daisy are staccato and unrestrained and monotonously low-pitched throughout. One cannot expect of the dialogue of fictional characters that it be a literal transcript of a slice of real-life conversation, but one can justifiably expect from it generous doses of verisimilitude. Daisy, seconds after meeting Nduli for the first time, says a most unnatural thing: "Come, lonely one, do you want some tea?" Abrahams has so mishandled his characters' speeches that he has put in Daisy's mouth an utterance not permitted by the emotional field of a dialogue which is, in its entirety, perfunctory.

If Abrahams's skill at dialogue is at a low ebb in *Song of the City*, it is never much better in any of his other novels. Like many twentieth-century political novelists with explicit political themes, Abrahams uses dialogue primarily for that which should be secondary, namely, for creating debate between his characters. In *The Path of Thunder*, no sooner do the Coloured Lanny, the Jewish Isaac, and the black Mako meet at Isaac's house than their conversation is charged with the politics of race. Isaac says, "Surely, there's colored nationalism," Mako agrees emphatically, "indeed!" but Lanny has his doubts, "I don't know....Colored people don't talk about nationality and race and color."[57] The debate continues. In *This Island Now*, Andrew Simpson catches up with Martha Lee, as she walks out of Josiah's office, and says, "....You know...that for the hungry and the homeless and the illiterate and those in darkness in the bush your free press and free speech have not meant anything"; Martha Lee counters, "Tyranny often has small beginnings, like inhibiting one journalist a little."[58] The debate rages on. Even in Abrahams's most popular novel, *Mine Boy*, there is many an unbearable dialogue. In one instance, Xuma says to Paddy O'Shea, "I am a black man. My people are black. I love them," and the red-haired Irishman replies, "That is good. It is good to love one's people and not to be ashamed of what one is. But it is not good to think only as a black man or only as a white man...."[59] The debate has only just begun. Dialogues like these are the rule in Abrahams's novels, not the exception; and they subtract from his art. Perhaps the political novelist, in a highly political age like ours, cannot help presenting in his fiction the debates which are in his own mind; he cannot help, as it were, thinking aloud. Be that as it may, he must not make the debates the dialogue, his characters must not be his obvious mouthpieces. Instead, he should make the debates emerge naturally from the dialogue, he should conduct his debates even as he portrays his characters.

This is, very happily, the case with *Tell Freedom* where, through his dialogues, Abrahams makes an art of the process of thinking aloud. One day, upon rising from the floor of a shop in Petersburg where he has been thrown by a giant of a white man, Peter finds himself in the following dialogue with his friend Jonathan:

> "Are you hurt?" Jonathan's voice was tight.
> "No." I felt awfully tired and numb.
> I looked at Jonathan's face. It was bleak. He avoided looking at me.
> "We will go back," he said. "I think it is better, heh?"
> "Yes," I said.
> We got off the truck and took the road out of the little dorp, the road back to the college. We did not talk. There was nothing to talk about. In the late afternoon, we went off the road and sat on a green hill while we ate the loaf of bread. Then we set out again. My brain began to function once more. (Tell Freedom, pp. 287-288)

Here, Abrahams's psychological penetration is admirable. Racial violence! What better opportunity for characters who suffer from it to make theatrical utterances! Yet Abrahams, as a skillful autobiographer writing honestly from lived experience must do, allows Jonathan and Peter only restrained speech and, thereby, demonstrates his understanding that it is not fitting for human beings, who have just been humiliated and deeply hurt, to speak prodigally. Abrahams resists the temptation to use the dialogue between Peter and Jonathan for expository purposes, to use it to try to explain a white man who turns violent unprovoked. He, in effect, uses the dialogue sparingly, and it is this paucity of words which makes the dialogue effective. The reader understands, as Peter says in reported speech, that, for wounded souls like Jonathan and Peter, "There was nothing to talk about" (Tell Freedom, p. 288). But, for Peter, there is a lot to think about, lingering memories of the violence by which he has just been victimised. Try as he would to concentrate on other things, he cannot forget the face of the white man who flung him to the floor, a white face saturated with disgust at beholding a black skin. Abrahams does not make Peter express these intimate thoughts in the dialogue. He ends the dialogue; then, in a masterpiece of interior monologue, he expresses Peter's thoughts as the involuntary workings of a troubled mind:

> ....The truck [from which Peter and Jonathan have just alighted] rattles....Yes, damn, the truck rattles. It is no use. Why did he look so sick with disgust? The other [the violence] wouldn't have mattered if he had not looked so sick with it. Am I really like an ordure to him?... Yesterday I phoned the station. The white man said good-day to me.... The disgust one feels when touching human waste. White and black. No! The truck will pick us up. You're only making it worse by being so tense, Jonathan. Let's try to forget it. Not the same as spittle. But that disgust.... (Tell Freedom, p. 288)

Abrahams's stylised language in Tell Freedom is another feature of his autobiography which helps to solidify its claims to creative literature. The "search for the appropriate language," observe Porter and Wolf, "is as important in autobiography as in fiction or poetry."[60] Abrahams's training in the proper usage of the English language began during his two years at Grace Dieu in South Africa where, as the following passage from Tell Freedom shows, his guides were a priest and the Bible:

> Father Adams was a purist about both spoken and written English. He set an exacting standard.... Whenever I used big words or made clumsy and almost meaningless sentences, he sent me to the Bible:
> "The Bible says: 'Jesus wept.' I suppose that would be too simple for you. Read the Bible if you want to see how good English should be written!"
> I read the Bible and saw. (Tell Freedom, p. 261)

On this man who "read the Bible and saw," the linguistic influence of the Holy Book is surprisingly nearly invisible; nowhere in his work is it as evident as it is in, say, the writing of Saint Augustine or that of Alan Paton. The only possible influence that the Bible may have had on Abrahams's linguistic style is discernible in his preference for the nonperiodic sentence. Randomly pick a page from Tell Freedom, and you will find sentences which are as syntactically relaxed, as free of embedded phrases and clauses, as a characteristic Bible verse. Here is an example:

> The woman spoke soothingly and quieted me down. About me was the big world. There was so much of it. Motors flashed by. Trams rumbled along. Large horses dragging huge carts pranced up and down the wide Delarey street. Shop windows were filled with new and interesting things. My head jerked from left to right. I forgot my home and my mother. All this was new, excitingly new. (Tell Freedom, p. 11)

In this passage, the point is not that the nonperiodic sentence is a virtue in itself; the point is that, in their abundance and brevity, the nonperiodic sentences conjure up a vivid portrait of the little boy's mind, of his consciousness, of his perception. Unlike the adult, the child has no Golan Heights from which to observe the complex and intricate world it has been born into. From the child's unenviable point-of-view, the world is as it was in the beginning--chaos. "Only by resurrecting our own memories," says Orwell in an autobiographical essay, "can we realize how incredibly distorted is the child's vision of the world."[61] It is this sense of confusion in little Peter's perception of the world that the autobiographer effectively evokes in his repetition of nonperiodic sentences which tell of fast action ("Motors flashed by"), noise ("Trams rumbled along"), and dazzle and colour ("Shop windows were full of new and interesting things"). The little boy's head jerks from left to right because everywhere, it seems, are sights and sounds.

"Sights and sounds," as has been rightly pointed out by the English philosopher R.G. Collingwood, are part of the artist's "total imaginative experience." According to Collingwood, sights and sounds constitute "the language in which" the artist's "emotion utters itself to his consciousness."[62] Language is the representer of emotion, the signifier of artistic feeling. Not so, argues another school of thought, language is not representational or imitative; it merely contains a reference to that which it signifies. According to this opposite viewpoint, we know the meaning of a word not because the word is naturally related to what it signifies, but because the word is different from all other words outside its etymology. Language does not reflect objective reality. As one proponent of this view puts it, "It is the world of words that creates the world of things," not vice versa.[63] This statement is true, but it is not the whole truth. For here is a passage from Tell Freedom which clearly validates Collingwood's thesis, a passsage which shows that, sometimes, the world of things does create the world of words:

> The engine puffed and snorted. Every now and then, when the train curved round the bend, it screamed its shrill warning. And the wheels, under me, whispered: "On a-w-a-y. O-n a-w-a-y. O-n a-w-a-y." Then they said: "On away. On away. On away." Then they said: "On away, on away, on away." And after that, for nearly all the time, they said: "Onawayonawayonawayonawayonawayonawayonaway." (Tell Freedom, pp. 11-12)

First, one must say that this piece of descriptive prose, superb as it is, does not express the feeling of an Everyman on steel wheels; the same train travel experience would, no doubt, produce different emotions in different travellers. One must also concede that the particular language used in this passage enacts for the reader a specific scene which cannot but be seen through the lenses of the enactor. Therefore, it is not wrong for anyone to state the view that language is not mimetic of objective reality. However, those who state this view become criticisable when they fail to realise that a particular form of language can be engendered by a particular real-life experience. Abrahams's prose in this passage is a product of little Peter's feelings--emotions recollected in tranquillity, maybe, but still emotions which have never been entirely forgotten. Before a person ever begins to write, argues Orwell, "he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape."[64] Collingwood agrees that reality is not objective, that "In so far as this world is...expressive or significant, it is he [the artist] that has made it so"; but he also contends that the sights and sounds of this world are the artist's language, that "His world is his language."[65] The artist creates his own world; but so does the world create the artist. This is no unidirectional equation. If the chicken produced the egg, the egg also produced the chicken; if thought corrupts language, language, in turn, corrupts thought, and so on. To show the extent to which the sounds of a steam-engine gave Abrahams the language with which he described one of his life's experiences, the passage from Tell Freedom cited above must be examined a little more closely.

Worthy of note is Abrahams's use of sound-verbs to indicate the changing speed of the train. At the start of the journey from Vrededorp to Elsburg, the train, which has only just begun to roll, is described as having "puffed and snorted"; figuratively, the engine has awoken from sleep and has come alive. Upon the imagination of little Peter, the train impresses itself as a human entity complete with human attributes. When it deems it necessary, upon rounding a bend and gathering speed, to warn the unsteeled, destructible humans who might be in its way, it "screamed its shrill warning." In addition to the sound-verbs, Abrahams uses other sound images and some typography to convey little Peter's sense of the acceleration and the crescendo of the steam-engine. At the start of the trip, the train's wheels "whispered" to Peter: "On a-w-a-y. O-n a-w-a-y. O-n a-w-a-y." The sound-verb "whispered" communicates the point that the engine, which has just woken up from sleep, is still soft-spoken; and the use of dashes to break up the expressive phrase "On away" into pairs of letter units each of which is begun with a capital letter and punctuated with a full stop effectively captures the extremely slow movement of the starting train. As the pace of the steam-engine quickens, its wheels "said" to Peter: "On away. On away. On way." The fact that the train no longer "whispered" but "said" to Peter means it is gaining power, and the absence of the dashes, which were inserted within words to draw their component letters apart, signifies the gradual acceleration of the train. Then, the steam-engine's wheels again "said" to Peter: "On away, on away, on away." The repetition of the assertive sound verb "said" can only mean that the train has acquired even more power, and the yeilding of place by the full stop to the comma implies that the speed of the train is now considerably fast. When the steam-engine accelerates to its fastest speed, its sound ceases to be punctuated, words merge into each other, seven instances of "On away" become one endless, metallic, onomatopoeic sing-song: "Onawayonawayonawayonawayonawayonawayonaway." This is language at its most descriptive, at its most evocative, and yet, charmingly, at its most childlike.

Even when Abrahams's prose is not childlike, it is always simple. But simplicity must not be confused with colloquialism or everydayness; Tell Freedom is, from beginning to end, rendered in very stylised language. This, for example, is the language with which Abrahams announces the arrival of a poor family in the comparatively well-off Coloured location called City and Suburban:

> ...the people were slumland's children: the old woman, hard and ageless, whose rasping voice carried to us as she interspersed her instructions with curses; the brutal-looking young man who carried all the heavier things; the two fat, squat, ribald younger women who spoke at the top of their voices; the litter of dirty children of all shapes and sizes; all this was slumland suddenly catapulted into aspiring City and Suburban. (Tell Freedom, p. 237)

The average reader will understand this passage without effort; but the attentive reader will also not fail to notice the cautiousness and self-consciousness with which the passage is written: the consistent rhythm of the sentences, the presence of the adjectival clause in three consecutive sentences, the consequent balancing of these sentences, and the description of the children with imagistic metaphors like "litter" and "slumland's children." Without being complex, Abrahams's language in Tell Freedom is emphatic, and Abrahams achieves this effect of emphasis mainly through the repetition of grammatical structures. When he is not, as in the passage above, repeating an adjectival clause, he is repeating a prepositional phrase: "All the years of his [Oupa Ruiter's] life had been spent walking through the land; from east to west, then back; from north to south, then back" (Tell Freedom, p. 80); or a conditional clause: "He [Oupa Ruiter] never had to pay for food or drink. And if he wanted to talk they hung on every word he said. And if he wanted to be silent, they were content to sit with him" (Tell Freedom, p. 81); or an adverb of place: "To this street and this house came the Ethiopian. There he wooed my mother. There he won her.... From there they sent their boy and girl to the Coloured School.... From there the Ethiopian went to work on the mines..." (Tell Freedom, p. 6); or a nominative pronoun: "They [the housemaids of Vrededorp] pranced awkwardly in the streets.... They wore hats and white gloves.... They laughed and chattered loudly" (Tell Freedom, p.123). But if Abrahams's language in Tell Freedom is not demotic, is it, to borrow a term from Northrop Frye, "hieratic"?

In *The Well-Tempered Critic*, Frye presents a theory of linguistic styles which he considers more fundamental than the traditional low (plain), middle (mean), and high (grand) styles. He distinguishes between two basic linguistic tendencies in literature: the demotic tendency which he says "is to minimize the difference between literature and speech...," and the hieratic tendency which "seeks out formal elaborations of verse and prose."[66] On these two fundamental styles, Frye then superimposes the conventional low, middle and high stylistic levels, and comes out of this exercise with sub-categories which he calls "low demotic," "middle demotic," "high demotic," and "low hieratic," "middle hieratic," and "high hieratic."[67] Now, as has already been pointed out in this discussion, Abrahams's language is not demotic, certainly not as indisputably demotic as Alex La Guma's, through characters like Michael Adonis and Willieboy, is in *A Walk in the Night*. Nowhere in *Tell Freedom* (or in Abrahams's novels) do uneducated, petty-criminal characters say words like "Howzit" when they mean "How's it," phrases like "Give metchie, please" when they mean "Do you have a box of matches," and they never think in language like this: "Yes, baas (*you mucking bastard boer with your mucking gun and your mucking bloody red head*)."[68] According to Frye, the "low hieratic" is the style, often full of "deliberate or conscious wit," which is employed in such experimental prose forms as euphuism and echolalia[69] the "high hieratic," he explains, is that grandest of styles in which language reaches many moments of lyrical intensity, in which poetry is endowed with "an oracular quality."[70] Belonging to neither of these two extremes of the hieratic mode, the language of *Tell Freedom* may more appropriately be classified as "middle hieratic" which, observes Frye, "is the ordinary formal language of poetic expression.... the consciously literary style that a poet develops and gets to use out of habit."[71] However, if Abrahams's language may be said to belong to the "middle hieratic" category, this language has nothing in common with the "Deliberately rhetorical prose" which Frye places in the same category. Indeed, Abrahams seems congenitally incapable of deploying in his writing the traditional devices of oratory. The following passage, which begins on the penultimate page of *Tell Freedom*, marks the height of oratory beyond which no passage in the writing of Abrahams gets:

> And in my contacts with them the Europeans had made it clear that they were the overlords, that the earth and all its wealth belonged to them.... And because I had not been free to show my real feeling, to voice my true thoughts, my submission had bred bitterness and anger. And there were

> nearly ten million others who had submitted with equal anger and bitterness. One day the whites would have to reckon with these people. One day their sons and daughters would have to face the wrath of these embittered people.... One day they may have to submit to the same judgment of force they have invoked in their dealings with us.... (Tell Freedom, p. 370)

From a writer who uses as few periodic sentences as possible, and who makes the few that he uses as concise as possible, it is not surprising that there is no earth-shaking oratory. The passage is, to use three important terms from rhetorical criticism, minimally "deliberative" and "forensic," and it is not in the least "epideictic." It is barely "deliberative" because it is not a sustained, emotional appeal for a change of heart in South Africa, and it is barely "forensic" because its speaker's voice and manner are not lawyerlike, a far cry from the voice and manner of that most forensic of accounts, Socrates's Apologia, where is told the story of another independent thinker who was victimised by his own country. The passage is not "epideictic" because it is not exhibitionistic, not, to use Frye's phrase, "deliberately rhetorical."

The remainder of this chapter one must devote to a consideration of Abrahams's use of atmosphere as technique, to an exploration of the relationships he creates between the pictorial landscapes and the human crises in his created world. To do this, one must discuss not only Abrahams's autobiography but also his novels, for Abrahams's keen eye for atmosphere is evident in every single one of his published works. Also, a demonstration to the effect that the technique of atmosphere in the novels is little different from that in the autobiography would be yet another argument in support of the case that Tell Freedom belongs in the realm of literary literature.

To Abrahams, a creative writer worth his salt must be ceaselessly interested in the socio-physical landscapes and the meteoric phenomena of the worlds he depicts. The writer must indulge in seeming frivolity if he is not to become one of those lifeless idea-manufacturing machines that professional philosophers are. "What I mean is this," Abrahams explains through a character in Dark Testament,

> The doctor who delivers the woman of her child is doing a job. Just a job. If he is a new one, there is some excitement in it. But it's still just a job.... But with you [the sympathetic reader] and me it's so different. It's the earth. Centuries of earth. Timeless earth. It's the earth bursting loose slowly. Coming up and breaking up. Opening up. You know, like a ball of damp earth falling apart. And you see inside it. You see nothing. But it's beautiful to see it, although it's nothing.... That is what philosophers miss. That's why I hate them sometimes.[73]

In the practice of his art, Abrahams's interest in the changing moods of landscape and weather is rarely an idle delight. Between the atmosphere and the stream of human life it envelopes, Abrahams establishes an equation. In the short story, "Thanksgiving," it is in "a misty Cape Town morning" that Annie finds the appropriate metaphor to express her unhappy life with her parents: "....Misty morning, half-caste mother. Misty morning before six. It's 'The old man must have his coffee!' It's 'The old man must have his rest!' Misty eyes, old half-caste mother, in the misty morning."[73] The mist leitmotif is an expression not only of Annie's domestic misery, but also of the daily routines of the tired Cape Coloured workers: "They [the workers] hurried on through the mist and the thin fine rain, to be at work on time. They found no beauty in the stillness of the morning. The foghorn was as monotonous as the lives they led. No change. No variety. Monotonously steady and continous."[74] In its efforts to make a misery of human life, mist does not escape competition from another atmospheric element, rain:

> As Annie turned the corner and entered the main street that led to the factory where she worked, it began to rain. A thin, fine steady Cape Town rain. A rain that tried to use the mist as a cloak, so that people would blame the mist for making them wet. The air had been heavy and dull; the rain added wetness, to make the day a misery.[75]

In similar fashion does Abrahams use atmosphere to reinforce theme in Song of the City. The depression into which Van der Merwe sinks--a depression caused by the war-time pressures of his political office, the fact that his retarded relative has had a child with a black girl, and the growing rift between him and his wife--is reflected in the wanness of the moon from which he seeks consolation: "I must not let it hurt me so," he said, "and was more acutely conscious of the pain. He looked up at the sky and the pale moon looked down at him."[76] In Wild Conquest, a novel whose very title conjures up images of the wilderness, atmosphere serves as an ever-present, picturesque background against which the theme of conflict unfolds. It is in the tall grasses of the Kalahari that the hostility between Boer and Bushman finds deadly voice. Koos Jansen is chillingly aware of this as he rides through the shrubs towards the farmstead of his brother, Kasper:

> On either side of the almost vanished track, grass and shrub grew thickly to the height of a tall man's waist, so that rider and horse seemed to be swimming through a sea of grass. And the blood-flecked eyes of the man [Koos] were trained on the flowing grass. The tall grass, and the shrubs and the mounds and rocks, these were the enemy. Death reached out from them with the swiftness of controlled lightning. The poison-tipped dart of a little Bushman. The sharp, well-aimed spear of a black warrior. Death came swiftly with the faintest of whispers.[77]

If the "tall grass, and the shrubs and the mounds and rock...were the enemy," they were so only in a metaphorical sense; literally, man--Boer and Bushman, white man and black man--was the destroyer. To make nature the literal enemy, as Koos does, is to take to self-deception; Koos would rather not face the truth that the evil is not out there in nature, but in himself, that it is a partnership he shares with the black man. In a country as poisoned by conflict as South Africa has been, men, in their dark moments, lose the ability to contemplate nature with the minimum of objectivity and detachment. White men cannot separate their aesthetic delight in an area of land from their inaesthetic feeling that beautiful land must be declared "European," and, as Dawood Nunkhoo reflects in *A Night of Their Own*,

> water was clean or dirty, not because of filtration or the lack of it, but because Kaffirs or coolies had either used it five or ten miles further up or not. If it had gone underground immediately after use by the Kaffirs or coolies and emerged soft and purified, it would still be dirty, for it had been used by Kaffirs or coolies. So here too,...the deception was necessary."[78]

If nature is never the villain in the affairs of men, it can be a merciless illuminator of human misery. This is one of the main points that Abrahams makes in that scene in *A Night of Their Own* where Dicky Naicker smuggles the disguised Nkosi out to safety:

> In cold countries the environments of the poor are dull and drab too, but there the light of the sun is not so bright, not so sharp, not so clear, not so harsh; and so there is a softening greyness to even the face of poverty. In the tropics and sub-tropics every fine little detail of dirt and filth and ugliness is sharpened and refined and clarified by the warm brilliance of the sun. And even the earth, which one rarely sees bared in cold countries, is given a new dimension of ugliness by its nakedness. So one of the most squalid sights in all the world is the bare, naked back yard of a tropical home where the sun has burned all the life out of the exposed earth, turning it a dead dirty brown, and where armies of flies make sport and do battle over every edible bit of dirt on the naked earth."[79]

But Abrahams is not interested in the drabness of the South African earth for its own sake; he uses the barenness and squalor of the land as a back-cloth in his portrait of the poverty of the inhabitants of the slums. As Dicky Naicker and Nkosi try to make it to a hideout in Natal's hills, says Abrahams, "The people they met and passed also had the same dull drabness, the same air of rundown squalor as the place." Like the land on which they live, the people "seemed parched and hard and dried out. The strapping well-fed looking ones, like Dicky Naicker, stood out in sharp relief against the majority."[80] Abrahams's use of nature to emphasise theme can be economical and pointed. In a reference to Uganda in the final, Jamaica section of *The View from*

Coyaba, he states: "For many of the best sons and daughters of Uganda were scattered all over the place, like dry leaves in a strong wind."[81] Its appropriateness aside, this nature-simile is effective because it is unexpected and sudden and inelaborate. For one brief second, it flashes before the reader a picture of the terror of Idi Amin which sent many Ugandans fleeing across the border.

If Abrahams's use of atmosphere in his novels is effective, it is in Tell Freedom that he employs atmosphere most sustainedly. In his autobiography, Abrahams is interested not merely in specific elements of atmosphere as strengtheners of theme, but also in the cycle of the four seasons as a shaping device. Tell Freedom opens in early winter the unpleasant coldness of which triggers in the young Lee a longing for a "raindrop world...a place of warmth and sunshine" (Tell Freedom, p. 3). It is the winter which partly makes cow dung indispensable in South Africa's locations; Lee calls cow dung "precious" because it is used to make, among other things, "the fire that fights off the cold" (Tell Freedom, p. 21). Lee prizes dung because he knows how unbearable the winter is; here is his experience of it one morning:

> There was a sharp bite to the morning air I sucked in; it stung my nose so that tears came to my eyes; it went down my throat like an icy draught; my nose ran. I tried breathing through my mouth but this was worse. The cold went through my shirt and shorts; my skin went pimply and chilled; my fingers went numb and began to ache; my feet felt like frozen lumps that did not belong to me, yet jarred and hurt each time I put them down. I began to feel sick and desperate. (Tell Freedom, p. 31)

Such is the severity of the winter that the collective imagination of the children of Elsburg location cannot help personifying it:

> For us children, the cold, especially the morning cold, assumed an awful and malevolent personality. We talked of "it." "It" was a half-human monster with evil thoughts, evil intentions, bent on destroying us. "It" was happiest when we were most miserable. Andries [a friend of Lee's] had told me how "it" had, last winter, caught and killed a boy. (Tell Freedom, p. 32)

Not even the pain of hunger could rival the cruelty of winter:

> Hunger was an enemy too, but one with whom we could come to terms, who had many virtues and values. Hunger gave our pap, moeroga, and crackling a feast-like quality. When it was not with us, we could think and talk kindly about it. Its memory could even give moments of laughter. But the cold of winter was with us all the time. "It" never really eased up. There were only more bearable degrees of "it...." "It" was the real enemy. (Tell Freedom, p. 32)

The adult autobiographer easily transfers these childhood experiences of winter to his art where winter becomes the season of misfortune, misadventure, and ill-deed. During one winter alone, the following things happen: "Food was scarce, so a hungry Reverend

Mr. Rogerson walked the streets, looking pinched and blue," "A number of Vrededorp men broke into grocers' and butchers' shops and stole food and money," Aunt Mattie accuses innocent Lee of theft, a hooligan forces Lee to beg for money, and Harry (Lee's step-brother) and his wife bandy hostile words (Tell Freedom, pp. 163-170).

Then spring comes and lessens the pain of winter. "Slowly, day by day," remembers the autobiographer, "the world of Elsburg became a warmer place. The cracks in my feet began to heal....The freezing nights changed, became bearable" (Tell Freedom, p. 42). In Abrahams's mind, spring has a definite association with love. This is why he opens Section vii in Book II of Tell Freedom with the following pair of symmetrical sentences, "Winter gave way to spring. / I fell in love that spring" (Tell Freedom, p. 236), and proceeds, a few pages later, to present us with a scene of a starry, lovers' night:

> We went down on the green grass. We sat holding hands, leaning against each other. Above us, in a cloudless sky, was the big moon, the Milky Way, and the Southern Cross. At last I turned my eyes from the city and looked at the girl beside me. She was beautiful, the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. And she was beside me. And her hand was in mine. And she loved me. And I loved her. (Tell Freedom, p. 245)

However, the real antidote to the ills of winter is not the emerging loveliness and (in the case of Lee) the love-suffused air of spring, but the hot, bright beauty and the therapeutic power of summer. With the coming of summer, says Abrahams, "the world became a softer, kindlier, more beautiful place. Sunflowers began blooming in people's yards. And people themselves began to relax and laugh" (Tell Freedom, pp. 42-43). Summer is the time to enjoy the beauty and feel of nature, so young Lee climbs "short willows," jumps "from stone to stone," tickles "long-tailed tadpoles," watches the springhaas, and lies on the green grass (Tell Freedom, pp. 43-44). For the young boy, an especially recreational feature of the summer landscape is the river. He tells us: "And sometimes I lay on my back...on the bank of the river and looked up at the distant sky, watching thin, fleecy white clouds form and re-form and trying to associate the shapes with people and things I knew" (Tell Freedom, p. 44). In these words, Abrahams is, consciously or unconsciously, giving us a glimpse of his artistic philosophy according to which landscape and weather are analogous to human beings and human action; for the young Lee's game of associating "the shapes [of clouds] with people and things" is, in effect, what has become the adult Abrahams's technique of exploiting atmosphere to enhance his theme. The very opposite of winter, which in Abrahams's art symbolises mishap, moodiness and ill-luck, summer is a season of friendship and gaiety. It is during the summer that Lee, on one of his visits to the river, meets Joseph the Zulu with whom he becomes very good friends. To the two friends, summer offers many opportunities for recreation and personal development. They spend "most of the long summer afternoons together," Joseph learning some Afrikaans from Lee who, in turn, learns some Zulu from Joseph. "Our days were full," remembers the autobiographer,

> There was the river to explore
> There were my swimming lessons,.....
> I learned to fight with sticks; to weave a green hat of young willow wands and leaves; to catch frogs and tadpoles with my hands; to set a trap for the springhaas; to make the sounds of the river birds.
> There was the hot sun to comfort us....
> There was the green grass to dry our bodies....
> There was the voice of the wind in the willows....
> There were the voices of two children in laughter, ours.... (Tell Freedom, pp. 46-47)

Autumn, the precursor of winter, is, in Tell Freedom, nearly as woeful a season as its colder follower. "So the summer passed," writes the autobiographer, "The autumn came. The leaves turned brown on the willows by the river. They fluttered to the ground and turned to mould" (Tell Freedom, pp. 49-50). Gone is the brightness of summer, gone the season of play and friendship! It is autumn, the season of mould, melancholy, and violent hostility. Released from jail in autumn, Abrahams's step-brother, Harry, is nevertheless "subdued, quiet, and depressed." Harry's quarrels with Aunt Mattie "grew more bitter" in autumn. It is in autumn that "a white man on a motorcycle cleared his throat and spat as he flashed by" Lee (Tell Freedom, p. 163). And "one fine autumn day three white boys pounced on" Lee as he "walked home from work" (Tell Freedom, p. 161). When Abrahams says, "The long days shortened suddenly. The cold came. Winter had come to torture us again" (Tell Freedom, p. 50), it becomes clear that the seasons have come full circle. It also becomes indisputable that, in Abrahams's hands, the seasons have become potent symbols which have run parallel to the autobiographer's messages, enhancing these messages and matching them at every complication.

If human beings are to live meaningful and peaceful lives, they must establish a relationship with the landscape on which they dwell. In Wild Conquest, men fight and kill and feel threatened because they have lost their sense of community with their landscape: "Only man is on the outside, alone and out of touch, not a part of this pre-conceived, pre-planned order. Only man, between darknesss and darkness, knows not the meaning of the whispering voice [of the Creator]. So, only man is alone, haunted by fear and the echoes that flow from fear."[12] Thirty-four years later, in The View from Coyaba, Abrahams's belief that man must commune with nature for his own benefit is still alive:

> If you listen to the wind, or the sound of the trees and the leaves, if you listen to the rain, if you walk on a special piece of earth and sit in a certain place on a certain rock, and if you are quiet, and if your senses are responsive, you will feel the spirits of those who have been in these places before; and if you learn to listen you may even hear them.[13]

In Tell Freedom, however, one senses that the relationship between man and his landscape is a symbiotic one, that landscape needs man as much as man needs landscape. For all its ability to generate joy in the hearts of human beings, even the landscape of summer can be forlorn if it is denied loving human contact. This is what Lee comes to understand when Joseph leaves Elsburg to return to his kraal: "I walked along the river that had been our kingdom. Now it was a desolate place. Joseph had been here with me: now Joseph had gone" (Tell Freedom, p. 49). Lee's need for his landscape is also psychological. In a country where his chances of acquiring anything are virtually nil, Lee finds in his landscape something he can call his own, even if only self-delusively. He calls the river in Elsburg, "my special world," and he takes his teenage girlfriend, Anne, to a green hill of which he says proudly: "This is my place. You're the first person I brought here" (Tell Freedom, pp. 44 and 245). Such is his attachment to his landscape that, when the time comes for him to leave South Africa, he remembers to commune with it one last time. On his last night, he walks to the sea over which "the big yellow moon hung low." He swims in it until his "arms began to ache" (Tell Freedom, p. 368). This is his ceremonial farewell to his landscape, a great companion in a troubled country.

That there is no objective conception of nature in creative literature is not hard to show. To a large extent, Abrahams's view of the seasons is similar to Tennyson's in the Idylls of the King. Like Abrahams, Tennyson associates spring with happy events. Lancelot, Arthur's emmissary, leaves to fetch Guinevere in "latter April" and returns with her "Among the flowers, in May...." During Arthur's marriage ceremony, "the fields of May" shine and "The Sun of May descended on their [the knights'] king."[14] In Tennyson's hands, as in Abrahams's, autumn and winter are symbols of pain and sadness. At the beginning of the idyll entitled "The Last Tournament," we see Dagonet the fool "high above the yellowing woods" dancing "like a withered leaf."[15] The lawless tournament itself begins at the "low roll / of Autumn thunder,"[16] and when it is over, Tristram sings a song to Dagonet in which there are such lines as "The woods are hushed, their music is no more: / The leaf is dead...."[17] Arthur dies, appropriately, in winter. Of summer, however, Tennyson's view is the very opposite of Abrahams's. Unlike Abrahams for whom summer is the best season, Tennyson uses summer as the backdrop for the most unhappy events in the Idylls. Vivien's dreadful activities which cost the lives of Balin, Balan and Merlin, Elaine's fatal love for Lancelot, the unholy quest for the Holy Grail, Ettarre's inhuman treatment of Pelleas, and Pelleas's consequent inhumanity all take place during one very long summer. It is interesting to note that spring, which is a good season in Tell Freedom and Tennyson's Idylls, is a bad season in T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land where "April is the cruelest month."[18] And if Abrahams and Tennyson dislike autumn, Abrahams's idol, John Keats, sings an ode to autumn, calling it a "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" and a "Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun."[19] There is even a recent suggestion by Abrahams that his concept of atmosphere--and by extension, his outlook on life--is not only subjective but also impermanent. Herein lies the meaning of that fine, powerful, last sentence of The View from Coyaba: "Suddenly, a shaft of light hit the mountains, transforming the view from Coyaba."[20]

Tell Freedom, then, is imaginative self-analysis. It helps to make the case that there is no hard line between literary autobiography and "pure" fiction. Partly because of the once prevalent (and still influential) attitude toward autobiography as a genre unworthy of serious literary analysis, and, no doubt, partly because of the irrepressible egotism of the artist, Abrahams calls attention to the writing process of his autobiogrpahy in which he also, indefatigably, advertises his reading. In doing this, as has been pointed out in this chapter, Abrahams is following an autobiographical tradition traceable as far back as Saint Augustine and practised by Romantic poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth, and by present-day African writers like Wole Soyinka, Alan Paton, and Ezekiel Mphahlele. However, all this self-referentiality and exhibitionism could not have won for Tell Freedom a place in the literary realm had it not been for the evidence in this autobiography of plot sufficiency, harmony of form and content, realistic dialogue, and the use of atmosphere as technique. These are characteristics which literary critics routinely look for in "pure" fiction; their presence in a work like _Tell Freedom_ should remind critics that, in the word "autobiography," _graphia_ (the writing) is at least as important as _autos_ (the self) and _bios_ (the life).

Notes

[1] Ali A. Mazrui, "The Patriot as an Artist," in African Writers on African Writing, ed. G.D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 80.

[2] Roger J. Porter and H.R. Wolf, The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 18.

[3] Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah (London, 1957; rpt. New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 35-47, 79-87, 110-122, 147-156, 281-290.

[4] George Orwell, "Why I Write," in An Age Like This, Vol. I of The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (1968; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979), p. 28.

[5] Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin(1961; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1977), p. 185.

[6] Saint Augustine, p. 253.

[7] Alan Paton, Towards the Mountain: An Autobiography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 88.

[8] Ezekiel Mphahlele, Down Second Avenue (1959; rpt. New York: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 206.

[9] Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 370. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[10] Saint Augustine, p. 144 and p. 58.

[11] William Wordsworth, The Prelude, ed. E.E. Reynolds (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1954), Book V. 60-61, 593-595 (pp. 60 and 73).

[12] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria: or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions, in Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (New York: Random House, Inc., 1951), p. 112.

[13] Wole Soyinka, Ake: The Years of Childhood (London: Rex Collins Ltd., 1981), p. 80.

[14] Alan Paton, p. 63.

[15] Alan Paton, pp. 61-62.

[16] Alan Paton, pp. 63-64.

[17] Mphahlele, p. 40.

[18] Mphahlele, p. 72.

[19] Wilfred Cartey, Introd., Tell Freedom, by Peter Abrahams (1954; rpt. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1970), p. vii.

[20] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in The Poetical Works of John Keats, ed. Lord Houghton (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887), p. 238.

[21] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in The Poetical Works of John Keats, p. 240.

[22] Wilfred Cartey, p. xiv.

[23] William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book II. 362 (p. 27).

[24] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," in The Poetical Works of John Keats, p. 238.

[25] William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," in The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. M.H. Abrams and others (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1962), II, p. 117.

[26] Cartey, p. xiv.

[27] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1960), p. 198.

[28] Saint Augustine, p. 253.

[29] Saint Augustine, p. 254.

[30] William Wordsworth, The Prelude, pp.145 and 152.

[31] Paton, pp. 138, 143, 155, 169, and 189.

[32] Paton, p. 248.

[33] Paton, p. 41.

[34] Paton, p. 42.

[35] Kolawole Ogungbesan, The Writing of Peter Abrahams (London; Sidney; Auckland; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), p. 91.

[36] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1942), p. 10.

[37] Ogungbesan, p. 91.

[38] Ogungbesan, p. 92.

[39] Porter and Wolf, p. 22.

[40] Porter and Wolf, p. 22.

[41] Soyinka, pp. 19-20.

[42] Michael Wade, Peter Abrahams (London: Evans Brothers Ltd., 1972), p. 111.

[43] Soyinka, pp. 213 and 228.

[44] Saint Augustine, p. 47.

[45] A.O.J. Cockshut, "Life as Fashioned," rev. of Figures of Autobiography, by Avrom Fleishman, Times Literary Supplement, 5 August 1983, p. 841.

[46] Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?" in The Essayist, ed. Sheridan Baker, 3rd ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Harper and Row; Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside Ltd., 1977), p. 7.

[47] Bernth Lindfors and others, eds., Palaver: Interviews with Five African Writers in Texas (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute, 1972), p. 40, as quoted in James Olney, Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 21.

[48] Lindfors and others, as quoted in James Olney, Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature, pp. 21-22.

[49] Mphahlele, pp. 106, 127, 136, 142, and 144.

[50] James Olney, Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 4.

[51] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament, p. 40.

[52] L.J. Potts, Aristotle on the Art of Fiction: An English Translation of Aristotle's Poetics (Cambridge: The University Press, 1959), pp. 28-29.

[53] Wade, pp. 102-104.

[54] Wade, pp. 104-105.

[55] Wade, p. 102.

[56] Peter Abrahams, Song of the City (Dorothy Crisp and Co., Ltd., 1945), pp. 45-46.

[57] Peter Abrahams, The Path of Thunder (New York and London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948), p. 85.

[58] Peter Abrahams, This Island Now (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 144-146.

[59] Peter Abrahams, Mine Boy (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), pp: 237-238.

[60] Porter and Wolf, p. 21.

[61] George Orwell, "Such, Such Were the Joys," in In Front of Your Nose, Vol. IV of The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (1968; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1979), p. 420.

[62] R.G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 291, as quoted in Porter and Wolf, p. 17.

[63] Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in his Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1977), p. 65.

[64] George Orwell, "Why I Write," p. 25.

[65] R.G. Collingwood, as quoted in Porter and Wolf, p. 17.

[66] Northrop Frye, The Well-Tempered Critic (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1963), p. 94.

[67] Frye, pp. 94-108.

[68] Alex La Guma, A Walk in the Night (1968; rpt. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974), pp. 4 and 33.

[69] Frye, p. 98.

[70] Frye, p. 104.

[71] Frye, pp. 99-100.

[72] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament, p. 56.

[73] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament, p. 105.

[74] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament, p. 107.

[75] Peter Abrahams, Dark Testament, p. 106.

[76] Peter Abrahams, Song of the City, p. 128.

[77] Peter Abrahams, *Wild Conquest* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 15-16.

[78] Peter Abrahams, *A Night of Their Own* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), p. 72.

[79] Peter Abrahams, *A Night of Their Own*, p. 101.

[80] Peter Abrahams, *A Night of Their Own*, p. 102.

[81] Peter Abrahams, *The View from Coyaba* (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 388.

[82] Peter Abrahams, *Wild Conquest*, p. 13.

[83] Peter Abrahams, *The View from Coyaba*, p. 429.

[84] Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Coming of Arthur," 24-25, 34-35, *Idylls of the King*, in *The Best of Tennyson*, ed. Walter Graham (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1930), p. 357.

[85] Tennyson, "The Last Tournament," 32-33, *Idylls of the King*, p. 557.

[86] Tennyson, "The Last Tournament," 33-34, p. 561.

[87] Tennyson, "The Last Tournament," 2-3, p. 565.

[88] T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, Book I.1, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M.H. Abrams and others (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1962), II, p. 1475.

[89] John Keats, "Ode to Autumn," in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. Lord Houghton (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887), p. 234.

[90] Peter Abrahams, *The View from Coyaba*, p. 440.

VI. Conclusion

That Abrahams is one of the meritorious Methuselahs of the twentieth century phenomenon known as African literature, even his most implacable critics have not felt disposed to question. It was the early works of Abrahams which forced an unwilling international community to expect vigorous, exalted and highly literary writing from non-white Africa although, as has been pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, these early works were assailed ruthlessly by untempered reviewers who, in the 1940s and 1950s, could not embrace an African writer who wrote without deference to the contemporary sociological and anthropological interest in the "dark continent." The Times Literary Supplement review of Dark Testament was an abominable job altogether, but the reviewer was not so impudent as to refuse to acknowledge Abrahams's powers of description.[1] In the New Republic, Daniel Friedenberg, pretending to have read Tell Freedom but unwittingly showing that he had not read it by calling the autobiography Abrahams's "first novel," praised Mine Boy as "a highly readable account," and called Abrahams "gifted."[2] In a review of A Wreath for Udomo, James Greene, in Commonweal, had this to say: "Abrahams has the crisp, tense style of a good reporter. But he also has the eye of an artist."[3] Far more than the novels--and there is a pleasant irony in this--Tell Freedom, the autobiography, helped to put a skeptical world to school about the ability of black Africans to write as imaginatively as other peoples. A Newsweek reviewer hailed Tell Freedom as a "deeply moving, tragically beautiful book," and commended Abrahams for having "the rare knack of writing about the squalor and poverty of his early childhood without ever becoming mired in his own bitterness."[4] High praise for Tell Freedom also came from the New York Herald Tribune where the reviewer Gene Baro called the autobiography "a book of permanent value," and described Abrahams's narrative as "at once harrowing, poetic, exciting, and heart-warming."[5] Clearly, there was acknowledgement of Abrahams's artistry in the columns of some of the major journals and magazines of the western world. Add to this acknowledgement the exaltation of Abrahams by such noteworthy observers as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nadine Gordimer, David Rubadiri, Wilfred Cartey, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Alan Paton, and there can be no question but that Abrahams deserves a pedestalled position among the significant pioneers of African literature and a respectable place among creative African writers generally.

What the present thesis has striven to do is illuminate the nature and quality of Abrahams's achievement. The impression that one leaves Abrahams's writings with is that of an indomitable spirit who, upon surviving South Africa's system of apartheid, turned round and rained on that horrendous system a stream of forceful freedom-preaching novels, an invaluable work of reportage, and an autobiography which, many agree, is an exceptionally beautifully crafted indictment of racism. From bad, good is sometimes born; what apartheid gave to Abrahams was a theme onto which he would forever cling, the theme of personal freedom, that freedom which, to him, is as precious and sacred as life itself. Nothing else would ever matter as much, not even the theme of negritude which was the endless song of such West African pioneer poets as Gladys Casely-Hayford, Senghor, David Diop, Bernard Dadie, and Raphael Armattoe, or the theme of the traditional African way of life which younger novelists like Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o felt duty-bound to explore. It is this theme of individual freedom which is at the heart of Abrahams's exploration of the subjects of deprivation and miscegenation, and his search through history is, in effect, a creative attempt to understand why personal freedom is hard to find in this world. By emphasising the primacy of personal freedom at a time when the preoccupations of black African writers were the celebration of black culture and the emancipation of Africa from the colonial yoke, Abrahams showed that he was ahead of his contemporaries, that he had superior analytical ability and prophetic insight. Today, some two-and-a-half decades after nominal political liberation, Africans are still crying for personal dignity and freedom; the bitter truth has dawned on them that what the white colonial masters of yore did to them, the black dictators of today are doing with equal barbarity. In 1956, the Ivorian negritude poet, Bernard Dadie, sang:

> Dry your tears, Africa!
> Your children come back to you
> their hands full of playthings
> and their hearts full of love.
> They return to clothe you
> in their dreams and their hopes.[6]

In the same year, in A Wreath for Udomo, Abrahams foretold, with astonishing near-accuracy, the disillusionment that would follow political independence in Africa. It is an aspect of Abrahams's achievement as a political novelist that he uses politics not merely as a tool of diagnosis, but also as a tool of prophecy. Today, African self-government has confirmed the prophetic warning that Abrahams delivered in Udomo and has, by the same token, made nonsense of Bernard Dadie's words, exposing them for the empty lyricism that they have become.

Another aspect of Abrahams's achievement is that he has freshened African revolt literature with an infusion of honesty and chivalry, with an unmistakable exhibition of a rigid determination to be fair to the butts of his attacks. In Dark Testament, Song of the City, Mine Boy, The Path of Thunder, Wild Conquest, Return to Goli, Tell Freedom, and A Night of Their Own, Abrahams presents the South African system of apartheid as the most vulgar expression of racism in the twentieth century. Without ever compromising this fundamental message, he nevertheless strives to delineate the villainous practitioners and sympathisers of apartheid understandingly. He ridicules these villains, scorns them, rages at them, and argues with them, but he never denies them their humanity and, sometimes, he even pities and forgives them. He, in effect, practises in his art what he preaches in the factual Return to Goli:

> I knew that in order to write I would have to purge myself of hatred, for good writing has always been born of love: Keats, Shelley, Shakespeare, Blake, Chaucer, Tolstoy, and all the host of others had testified to this in their writing. Art and beauty come of love: not of hate. And the rage and anger of love can be more powerful than that of hate.[7]

Abrahams also reminds us unfailingly that the racist demon is colour-blind, that not even the oppresssed non-white victims of apartheid are impregnable to its invasion. The intense hatred that the black man Jan feels for the white James Martin who has had an affair with the Bantu lady Jane (Dark Testament), the slaughter of Indians by blacks in the 1949 Durban riots (A Night of Their Own), the disgust of an Indian commoner at the sight of an Indian girl and a black man in love (A Night of Their Own), the unabashed contempt of the Coloured preacher of Stilleveld for the blacks whose community borders his own (The Path of Thunder), the delight of the members of a Coloured tenants' association in grumbling about "a Kaffir's one leg being in the bush"(Dark Testament)--these are all examples of the non-white racism which is ubiquitous in Abrahams's world. That Abrahams anatomises the racism of his own group, that of the Coloureds, more painstakingly than he does that of the other non-white groups is evidence of his refreshing sense of fairness, of his uncommon ability to be free of group loyalty.

It is with pleasure that one learns from Anthony Sampson, in his book, Drum, that Abrahams's capacity for relentlessly criticising his own oppressed, non-white side, that capacity which is very evident in his fiction,was also an aspect of the man in real life. Sampson was editor of Drum, the Johannesburg-based "black" magazine, when Abrahams returned to South Africa for six weeks in 1952. In those days of the fifties, Drum's Johannesburg office was visited by many a foreign correspondent or writer. "Our most spectacular visitor was Peter Abrahams," Sampson recalls.[8] Abrahams's visits to Drum were distinguished because he strode in confidently, sparing no one his unprovoked criticism. For the Englishman Sampson, Abrahams had gentle rebuke: "...you Tony..., you're too sensitive about the susceptibilities of your readers. You should treat 'em rough. Tell them their leaders are lousy and their politicians stink. They need to be criticised. They've got to stop being so touchy. I know. I'm one of them." But it was for Drum's non-European staff that Abrahams had harsher words. To Henry Nxumalo, his old Zulu friend and one time comrade-in-poverty, now assistant editor of Drum, Abrahams said: "These 'Masterpieces in Bronze' you write, Henry,...why do you make all Africans out to be angels? Take this man you've just written about: we all know he is an old drunkard--he was before I went to England. It's time Africans started criticising each other." Arthur Maimane, another of Drum's black journalists, came to the magazine from St. Peter's Secondary school of which Abrahams and Ezekiel Mphahlele were students in the late 1930s. Abrahams was irritated by him: "As for all this American slang of yours, Arthur, it's just wasting your talents. You should be writing literature, not rubbish...."[9] Abrahams's behaviour, it seems, was greeted not with hostility, but with thankfulness; it earned him the following lines of praise in Sampson's book:

> To Drum, Peters's frankness was invaluable. He was a unique bridge. As a black man, he could criticise Africans freely, and see their faults; as a European, he was aloof from bitterness and duplicity. He took a strong interest in Drum and its ideals. He attacked Jim, me and Henry alike. He swept away suspicion and misunderstanding, and cleared the air.[10]

Because of Abrahams, therefore, one cannot accept Ezekiel Mphahlele's view, in his Voices in the Whirlwind, that "we do not yet have in African fiction anything like George Orwell's manner of thrusting his hates and prejudices into the open."[11] In his knack for getting to the point, for stating his message baldly, and in his readiness to find honest fault with the people on whose behalf he makes a case, Abrahams is very much like Orwell. Just as Orwell saw no contradiction in defending Indian nationalism and criticising what he felt were distasteful Indian habits, in extolling the virtues of Gandhi and making good-natured fun of him, in championing the cause of England's poor and proclaiming the fact that the poor stank, so Abrahams, in one breath, portrays South Africa's non-whites as victims of racism and as racists themselves, as people who fight racism and as people who accept it, as prey and as predators, as festive in nature and as a sad, voiceless lot. When in 1936 the English communist publisher, Victor Gollanz, commissioned Orwell to write a book on mining conditions in the north of England, the as yet unknown and impecunious Orwell did not hesitate to turn the second half of the book, The Road to Wigan Pier, into a humorous denunciation of British communists. Similarly, in 1942, Abrahams, grateful to the communist newspaper, the Daily Worker, for giving him his first job in England and promoting him from the clerkship on to the editorial staff, nevertheless presented communists unfavourably in his book of that year, Dark Testament. When the Daily Worker retaliated by giving Dark Testament a scathing review, Abrahams, in spite of the fact that he was quite unemployable at the time, had the courage and integrity to leave the newspaper. Like Orwell, then, Abrahams is capable of "thrusting his prejudices and hates into the open," sometimes at great personal cost. Such honesty in the life of a writer, because it is also evident in his writing and is inseparable from his art, may be considered an aspect of his achievement.

One must conclude from the analysis made of Abrahams's works in this thesis that Abrahams's craftmanship in his fiction, is to a conspicuous extent, unsatisfactory. His most obvious fault as a novelist is his tendency to make intrusive comments, and it is a fault which is irritatingly apparent in his presentation of almost all his central characters--Dick Nduli, Xuma, Lanny Swartz, Anne Jansen, Michael Udomo, Richard Nkosi, Albert Josiah, and Jacob Brown. Often, Abrahams allows these characters to reveal themselves through their words and their deeds, but it is not uncommon to find him using some of them as vehicles to voice his own mental conflicts, and some of them as loudspeakers to blast his message of personal freedom to an increasingly illiberal world. Another of Abrahams's weaknesses that the present thesis has discussed is his inability to manage fictional dialogue. Both of these problems seem to be a consequence of the explicitly political nature of his novels. He is so preoccupied with the theme of individual freedom that he inadvertently sacrifices his art; he pushes this theme violently into the mouths of his central characters, and places it at the heart of many a dialogue. When theme is thus overemphasised, aspects of narrative skill and dialogue management cannot but suffer, for characters become the novelist's poorly disguised mouthpieces and dialogues are emptied of verisimilitude and saturated with stale political debate.

In spite of Abrahams's obvious deficiencies, however, he has managed to give African literature two of its unforgettable fictional characters. It is indisputable that Achebe's Okonkwo and Odili, Paton's Stephen Kumalo, Soyinka's Brother Jero, and Ngugi's Njoroge score the highest points in popularity; but following closely upon the heels of these characters, are Abrahams's Xuma and Michael Udomo. One of Abrahams's undeniable assets in his fiction is his admirable descriptive ability, his brilliant evocation of scenery. At their best, his powers of description perform the magic of rescuing his characters from dialogues which are clear literary hazards. They bring to life an atmosphere with which his characters relate, and in which they stand aglow, never to be forgotten.

Even as one concludes that Abrahams's craftmanship in his fiction is not always satisfactory, one must reiterate that his artistry is superb in his autobiography, Tell Freedom. In her Anne Radcliffe Memorial lecture at Harvard in 1961, Nadine Gordimer regretted that "with the exception of the novels of Peter Abrahams, there are no English novels written by black Africans for us to discuss." Then she proceeded to criticise black South Africans for writing more autobiographies than novels, for putting "the material that we might hope to see used in novels into [auto]biographies." "This sort of writing[autobiography], however interesting," Gordimer declared, "may make a competent journalist, but does not make a creative writer. And if a man has it in him to create, he should not squander the stuff of his experience."[12] It is statements like this that the last chapter of the present thesis argues against. It is in Tell Freedom, not in his novels, that Abrahams is most comfortable and competent in his use of such devices of the novelist as plot, stylised language, dialogue, and atmosphere. It is strange to say, but Abrahams the one-volume autobiographer is a better creative writer than Abrahams the multi-volume novelist. The solid demarcation line that Nadine Gordimer supposes exists between the novel and autobiography is merely imaginary, like the Greenwich meridian.

The present thesis has, finally, presented Abrahams as a writer driven by an uncommon sense of history. Abrahams's very life is a fragment of modern African history. He pioneered the flight into exile by South Africa's non-white writers, and dignified this flight with a simple, moving line: "I had to go or be for ever lost." He had not defected, he had not run from battle; he had escaped from a country determined to fill him with bitterness and hate, he had escaped so as to be able to write. In England, Abrahams found himself walking and talking and organising a pan-African conference with Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah, the two most colossal personalities of post-World War II African nationalism. Kenyatta returned to Kenya in 1946, and Nkrumah to the Gold Coast in 1947, each to lead his country to political independence. Given the fact that the Trinidadian George Padmore and the black American Du Bois found respectable advisory positions in Nkrumah's government, Abrahams, who was a close friend of both Nkrumah and Kenyatta, could easily have done the same; his principles and his sense that the creative writer's work is different from, indeed superior to, that of the politician must have stopped him from returning to Africa to work in a political capacity in either Kenya or Ghana. In an essay, "The Long View," he says:

> The politician is inevitably concerned with the immediate problems of the day. The writer must have the long view. The politician can speak to his people from the outside, from above, can rouse them to passions and prejudices that would lead to immediate action. The writer must speak to them from the depths of their own hearts and conscience. He must touch the tender and the clean and the beautiful in them and give them a new awareness of human worth and dignity; he must touch them to a compassionate understanding of the next tribe, so that they too become dignified human beings rather than the despised foreigners the politicians would make them out.[13]

This "long view" pervades all of Abrahams's works, but it especially informs his historical novels, The View from Coyaba, Wild Conquest, A Wreath for Udomo, A Night of Their Own, and This Island Now. Considered together, these five novels show Abrahams's artistic use of the history of imperialism and racial conflict. In these novels, we happen upon sentimental dialogues more often than we would like, but the novels do not, on the whole, sentimentalise the world's ugly racial and political history away. The novels are a sort of mirror into which we look and recoil from what we see, but they are not, in the final analysis, a series of jeremiads full of excessive dolefulness and prophesying inescapable doom for a world of irredeemable sinners. The African writer, says Abrahams, "must teach..., as have all writers throughout the ages, that the forces of love are stronger than the forces of hate." "But how," Abrahams asks rhetorically, "is he [the African writer] to do this in face of all the seething bitterness in Africa today?" Then, he answers:

> That is where his sense of history comes in. Life is an unending process of change. He must look closely at life and understand this process. If he does, he will not be cowed by the violent passions of his day. He will see the beauty of reality as the peasant tills his earth while battles rage about him, while conquerors come and go and political institutions are established and wither, and are established again and wither again. Only humanity and the thousands of years of human struggle to a greater dignity and freedom--only these are fixed.[14]

In his novels, Abrahams utilises history as only a man whose own life is a piece of Africa's modern history, and who is fiercely honest and creative, can do. He is an African writer who searches through history not for a way to present Africa (and black people generally) to the world, but for the authority to write powerfully in defence of human liberty.

But does Abrahams still regard himself as an African writer, given the fact that he has now been in Jamaica for some thirty years and even has to his credit one novel, This Island Now, which is wholly set somewhere in the Caribbean, and another novel, The View from Coyaba, which is partially set in Jamaica? This is the place, perhaps, in the closing pages of the present study, to say a few words in general answer to this question.

Worthy of prime note are some words from The View from Coyaba, words uttered by Jacob Brown who is recognisable, albeit in very small measure, as Abrahams. One day, in Jamaica, Jacob asks his daughter-in-law, Emma, to join him in his search for the family he left behind in Jamaica when he departed for the United States more than half-a-century earlier. No sooner do they drive into the village of Cyprus, Jacob's birthplace, than Jacob becomes disillusioned. The green land and the fruitful hills of his childhood and youth are no more; throughout the years, the land has been burnt repeatedly by people who have made the task of clearing the bushes quick and easy for themselves. The search for Jacob's family is fruitless, and this saddens Jacob. After nearly eighteen months, however, Jacob recovers sufficiently from the Cyprus experience to say to Emma: "It was a foolish impulse. Home is not always where you are born; family is not always a line of blood alone. You and the people of the mission[in Uganda] were and are my real family. This was just an old man's foolish dream; a foolish attempt to reach back to a dead past."[15] Soon after, he adds: "We came here[Jamaica] because we had to go somewhere and I did not want to go to America or Europe; I was weak and needed comforting so I thought returning to where I was born would do it. But it isn't home anymore, had not been for a very long time."[16] For Jacob, Uganda is home. He says to Emma, "...if I don't[live], promise you'll take my ashes home[to Uganda] for burial."[17] Is it possible, then, that, if the Jamaica-born Jacob considers Uganda home, the South Africa-born Abrahams now considers Jamaica home?

Yes, it is possible. Abrahams has lived in Jamaica since the late fifties; he had lived there for about five years when that country attained independence from Britain in 1962. If Abrahams continues to write, it is likely that he will write increasingly about his West Indian experience and, thereby, become a West Indian writer one day. Should that happen, he will become a Caribbean writer not instead of an African writer, but in addition to being an African writer. Until that happens, Abrahams must simply be considered an African writer, for to regard the Caribbean as home is not the same thing as to be a Caribbean writer. It is true that This Island Now, which is entirely about events in the Caribbean, seemed, on its publication in 1966, to have marked the beginning of Abrahams's Caribbean writing period. But for nearly twenty years after the publication of this novel, Abrahams did not produce another book. And in The View from Coyaba, his novel of 1985, he returns to give the African setting two hundred-and-six pages, six pages more than he gives the West Indian setting.

As far back as 1953, in the invaluable Return to Goli, Abrahams prophesied his endless dependence on Africa for creative substance:

> I am a child of the plural societies. When the strains and pressures had grown too much for me, I had escaped from the physical presence of the problem. But the problem itself is inescapable. It will be with me either till it is resolved or till the end of my days. It is the raw material of my work. The most challenging, the most exciting raw material in the world—and also, in one sense, the most inhibiting.[18]

The umbilical cord connecting Mother Africa with her artist-son has been cut, but the two will forever remain mother and son. At the end of his 1952 visit to South Africa, Abrahams's mind was in emotional turmoil, his desire to hurry out of racist South Africa warring against his attachment to the land of his birth:

> I was glad to leave that place, glad that Goli[Johannesburg] would soon be behind me. My family were down there and I was sorry to leave them, but I was glad to leave the place, the town, the whole country. For six weeks I had lived with its sickness, its hatreds and its fears, and I was glad to get away. Yet I was also sorry to go, for I am a child of Goli, forever involved in its problems.[19]

This mental conflict in Abrahams was discerned by Anthony Sampson, editor of Drum magazine, who was present at a party Abrahams threw the night before his departure. As Abrahams moved among his guests and chatted about Dylan Thomas and E.M. Forster, says Sampson, there were indications that, "underneath," the host was "feeling deeply the tragedy of his people, and thinking of his plane next day to Nairobi."[20]

In Tell Freedom, Abrahams dramatises his riverside meeting with Joseph, the Zulu lad who soon becomes his friend. At this meeting, Joseph introduces himself proudly, with a full sense of his identity. He smacks his chest and announces, "Joseph! Zulu!" Not wanting to seem less confident, Abrahams smacks his own chest and says, "Lee--" "But," Abrahams confesses, "I didn't know what I was apart from that."[21] One may imagine a meeting between Abrahams and another man who is very sure of his own identity, Nigeria's Chinua Achebe. At this imaginary meeting, Achebe would say, "Achebe! Igbo! Committed African writer!" Abrahams would reply, "Abrahams! writer!" He would, in this imaginary conversation, not know what he is apart from that; but, in that simple word "writer," would be packed all the Africanness, all the earnestness, all the creativity, and all the commitment to humanistic political values of Peter Henry Lee Abrahams.

Notes

[1] "The Native View," rev. of Dark Testament, by Peter Abrahams, Times Literary Supplement, 16 Jan. 1943, p. 34.

[2] Daniel M. Friedenberg, "From the Slums of Johannesburg," rev. of Mine Boy, by Peter Abrahams, New Republic, 27 June 1955, p. 20.

[3] James Greene, "A Last Frontier," rev. of A Wreath for Udomo, by Peter Abrahams, Commonweal, 13 July 1956, p. 376.

[4] "Black Boy in Vrededorp," rev. of Tell Freedom, by Peter Abrahams, Newsweek, 9 Aug. 1954, p. 83.

[5] Gene Baro, "African's World--'Yes, Baas,'" rev. of Tell Freedom, by Peter Abrahams, New York Herald Tribune Book Review, 8 Aug. 1954, p. 1.

[6] Bernard Dadie, "Dry Your Tears, Africa!" in West African Verse: An Anthology, ed. Donatus Ibe Nwoga (London: Longmans, 1967), p. 117.

[7] Peter Abrahams, Return to Goli (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 17.

[8] Anthony Sampson, Drum: An African Adventure--And Afterwards (1956; rpt. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. 52.

[9] Sampson, p. 54.

[10] Sampson, p. 54.

[11] Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 194.

[12] Nadine Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa," in African Writers on African Writing, ed. G. D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 45.

[13] Peter Abrahams, "The Long View: African Writers' Part in the Battle Against Racial Prejudice," African World (June 1952), p. 11.

[14] Peter Abrahams, "The Long View: African Writers' Part in the Battle Against Racial Prejudice," pp. 11-12.

[15] Peter Abrahams, The View from Coyaba (London; Boston: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 397.

[16] Peter Abrahams, The View from Coyaba, p. 397.

[17] Peter Abrahams, The View from Coyaba, p. 398.

[18] Peter Abrahams, Return to Goli, p. 29.

[19] Peter Abrahams, Return to Goli, p. 203.

[20] Sampson, p. 54.

[21] Peter Abrahams, Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 45.

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